

4 Questions to Check Your Church Culture

There's only so much you can learn about a church from their website.

Sure, you can check the church's doctrinal statement to find out what the people believe. You can see from the church calendar what programs run and how active people are in church activities. But the calendar and confession don't necessarily tell you about the church's *culture*.

Culture is the heart of your church, the atmosphere your church creates – **whatever makes your church unique.**

Unfortunately, the culture of a church doesn't always match the confession. And when the culture isn't aligned with the confession or the calendar, the culture typically wins. Which means, as church leaders, we shouldn't spend all our time stocking the calendar or tweaking the confession. Instead, we need to take a step back and ask some questions about our culture.

In [*Creature of the Word*](#), Matt Chandler, Josh Patterson, and Eric Geiger write:

"A church culture is healthy when there is congruence and consistency between what the church says is important to her and what others know *really is* important to her."

So how do you know what your church culture is like? Here are a few questions:

1. What are you funding?

If your website says "missions" is a core value, and yet the music ministry budget is four times as big as your missions ministry, your church culture doesn't line up with your stated values.

Follow the money. What are you funding? It's likely that the more inward-focused your budget is, the more inward-focused your church is.

2. What are your people talking about?

I recently spent some time on a college campus, and went to dinner with a couple guys. For two hours, all I heard about was the people these guys were discipling. Drug addicts. Homeless people. People far from God. It was clear from casual conversations that the culture of the school was mission-focused.

Spend time in casual conversations with the people in your congregation. You'll discover what people are excited about. Talk to them long enough and you'll discover the motivation behind the excitement. Are volunteers excited about VBS because of their love for kids, or because they hope to outshine the other churches across town? Are people always talking about personal preferences or how to be better effective in mission?

3. Who or what is the focus of attention?

What is the church focused on? Certain programs that give the church a good reputation? A ministry that gets good press? Powerful worship? Preaching? All these are good things can eventually supplant the worship of Christ.

Pity the pastor whose message is all about Jesus but whose ministry is all about himself! It's possible to say Jesus is the hero from the platform and yet live as if you're the hero of the church.

4. What are signs that back up your talk?

In *Creature of the Word*, a gospel-centered framework is described as a house.

- Theology is the foundation – what your church believes.
- Ministry philosophy is the structure and the design of the house, the commitments that undergird all your church does.
- Practice is the furniture of the house, what your church actually does.

Look at what your church is doing, the activities your church is involved in. And ask yourself where your practice aligns with your philosophy and theology. What are the signs that your people *actually believe* the confessional statement about evangelism? Or the core value of hospitality?

Look for the signs that back up your church's talk, and then publicly celebrate those signs constantly. [You become what you celebrate.](#)

Conclusion

It's possible to talk about grace and still be a legalist. It's possible to talk about Jesus and still be self-centered. It's possible to talk about guests and still be unwelcoming.

So check the culture of your church. Listen to those who visit. Ask friends to give you feedback. Don't give up until the Jesus you worship and proclaim from the platform is the center of everything your church does.

Read more from Trevin [here](#).