

SESSION 5:

MOULDING CULTURE

'Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.'

Romans 12:2

Key Question:	How might I begin to influence the culture of my frontline in accordance with Kingdom values?
Aims of the Session:	To see the values that underpin the cultures of our frontlines; to see how we might affirm the good and think creatively about bringing positive change where needed.
Core Text:	Matthew 5:13-16
Materials Required:	Bibles

Thinking Back (5 mins)

In the last session we looked at Ministering Grace and Love,

- How did you get on using your £3 to bless someone on your frontline this week? How did they react?



Pre-Film Discussion (10 mins)

Today, we're looking at Moulding Culture. This is about appreciating how we might contribute to cultural change on our frontlines, so that they become places where people better flourish. One definition of culture is 'the way we do things round here'.

- Together, can you briefly think of a few things that are part of the culture of your own small group?

You might like to think about the different components of your gathering, such as the way you interact with one another, the food you eat, the way you speak, how you pray...Or, you might find it helpful to ask yourself what an outsider would have to learn in order to do things as you are in the habit of doing.





PLAY FILM to pause point - approx. 5 mins 30 secs

Question for personal reflection at the pause point (5 mins)

- In a moment of quiet, think about the culture of your frontline. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of the way things are done there? Write down your thoughts as you will need to refer back to these later.



RESUME FILM to end - approx. 4 mins

Questions to discuss after the full film (10 mins)

- In the story of Elaine the headteacher, why do you think the original blame culture was bad for:
 - a) The staff?
 - b) The children?
- What do you think were some of the Christian values that inspired Elaine to instigate the change that she did?
- Elaine first exemplified the change that she wanted to see and in doing so brought others along with her. Are there already some things you try to do to go against the grain of a negative aspect of your frontline culture?

'Culture is the way we do things round here...the stories we tell, the rituals we perform, the rewards that we give, the heroes we admire, the slogans we repeat.'

Mark Greene



Bible Reflection - Matthew 5:13-16 (10 mins)

This passage comes towards the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus sets out the way of life for his followers. The 'blessed' sayings which come before (in 5:3-12) are not presented as high ideals we have to live up to so much as a signal that a different set of values is now in play. Such values characterise those who belong to God's kingdom and inevitably impact the world in which God's people live. When it comes to being 'salt' and 'light', notice that Jesus says 'You are...', not 'You should try really hard to be...' - a reminder that God sees us as those who really can 'mould culture' as we seek to live faithfully as disciples of Jesus.

- How might the images of 'salt' and 'light' help us think about what it means to influence our frontline culture?
- In 5:16, Jesus says, 'let your light shine before others'. What could this look like for you, practically, on a daily basis?

Exercise in Pairs (20 mins)

Come back to the things you wrote down about your frontline culture and then find a partner to talk through the following:

- Share with your partner a summary of what you wrote down.
- Is there one particular negative thing about the culture of your frontline that you would love to see change?
- Together look for a Kingdom antidote (alternative) that might address the negative thing you identified. How might God use you here to start to bring about change?
- Together, thank God for the positive elements of your frontline culture. Pray for each other that God will give you the wisdom, faith and courage to start influencing the culture of your frontline for his glory.



Praying Forwards - as a group (10 mins)

Take a moment to reflect on this quote from Reinhold Niebuhr, then pray it aloud together.

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Takeaway Action

Ask a couple of people on your frontline what they think is good and not so good about the culture of your frontline – their responses might spur you to action and may even open up opportunities for a conversation about the Christian faith!

'People fulfil their individual and collective destiny in the arts, music, literature, commerce, law and scholarship they build, and in the institutions they develop - family, churches, associations, and communities they live in and sustain - as they reflect the good of God and his designs for flourishing.'

James Davison Hunter





FRUITFULNESS ON THE FRONTLINE.

SESSION TRANSCRIPTS



SESSION 5: MOULDING CULTURE

Both my parents came from Glasgow. My father from Russian, Polish Orthodox Jewish stock and my mother from a northern Irish, Celtic-Pict, Scottish, Communist, Gentile family. Not surprisingly I am completely mixed up. And not surprisingly their union produced a very huggy-huggy, slobber- slobber, kissy-kissy family culture.

Now when it came to visitors, my mum had two rules. If it moves, kiss it. And if it's still moving, feed it.

It was our family culture... the way we did things round our home... And that's one definition of culture – the way we do things round here.

Every family has a culture, every workplace, every team, every church, every home group, every frontline...a way of doing things round here...some of it's good, some of it not so good, some of it downright destructive.

Now my family culture never struck me as unusual until I got to about ten years old and my reserved southern English, Gentile friends would come round. After a while I began to notice their discomfort, how they would pad tentatively through the front door like nervous antelope, their ears cocked, and their eyes scanning the terrain for danger, and then suddenly they'd whoosh up the stairs faster than Usain Bolt out of the blocks – all to escape the enveloping embrace of the kiss-monster.

Now, the culture in my home hadn't arisen accidentally.

My mum's huggy affection for my friends came out of a whole set of values about community, about hospitality, about food and about an adult's relationship with her kid's friends: an adult has a duty of care to someone else's child; it is right and good for an adult to show physical affection to someone else's child in greetings and farewells, and it is absolutely imperative that food is offered and that food is eaten. My mother's behaviour emerged out of a set of beliefs. Our beliefs shape our behaviour, if we think eggs are bad for our heart we don't eat many eggs but when new research tells us that they aren't, well, bring them on, scrambled, wet but not runny with a smidgen of salt and lots of freshly milled black paper served on crunchy hot toast. Beliefs shape behaviour.

So the question is how might our Christian beliefs, our kingdom values shape our behaviour and shape a culture on our frontlines that is more likely to help people flourish. How can we, as it says in Jeremiah 29:7 not only pray for but seek, the shalom, the peace and prosperity of the frontline God has called us to.

What's good about the way people do things on your frontline? What's worth cheering? And what isn't good? Not only for us but for others? In Romans chapter 12, Paul exhorts the Christians:

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Paul knows it's pretty easy to end up behaving like everyone else – gossiping cos everyone does, being a bit too concerned about the sculpting of your abs cos everyone else is. So we look for ways not only to change our own behaviour but to change the way things are done around us.

Perhaps the culture at your gym is very narcissistic, very self-focused – what can you do to make it less so? Well, maybe you might suggest that the Christmas party includes a raffle in aid of kids overseas who need cleft palate surgery or that the money goes towards a table tennis table for the council's youth club.



Perhaps you dislike the way that everyone in your family fiddles with their phones over meals - messes up conversations. So maybe, like one family, you make everyone pop their mobiles into a basket before the meal like a sheriff in the Wild West confiscating every cowboy's Colt 45 when they ride into town (Bow-ooh-wah-ooh-wow... ie Good, Bad & Ugly theme). Mobiles and Colt 45s can be bad for relationships.

Maybe you dislike the way everyone in the retirement home seems just to sit around watching too much TV so you celebrate everybody's birthday with a multiple choice quiz about their lives so that residents get to know each other, or you put on a family history hour... or ... and relationships deepen. And when a culture becomes more like a kingdom culture, that's fruitfulness.

Culture is the way we do things round here and so it is made up of pretty much everything: the stories we tell, the rituals we have, the rewards that we give, the heroes we admire, the slogans we repeat. There's good news and bad news in that.

The bad news is that because values are expressed in all those ways it can be quite hard to change a culture. The good news is that because values are expressed in all those ways it can be quite easy to find a way to begin to change a culture.

Before I tell you a story you might want to pause the film and discuss some of the positive and negative aspects of the culture of your frontline?

Here's a true story.

Elaine is a head teacher of a primary school in Glasgow.

One day something really quite bad happened. A ten year old boy, a particular ten year old who'd had a long history of being a troublemaker, and we'll call him Alex, had gone ballistic in the school playground, shouting, swearing and screaming. .

A member of staff had gone out to try to defuse the situation, talked to one of the other children and was pretty convinced that actually Alex was to blame. A second member of staff came up and also was convinced that Alex was to blame and then a third, and Alex then lost his temper. And he ran out into the school field. Elaine, the head teacher was informed. And she went out to talk to him.

"It wasn't me miss. It wasn't me. I didn't do it. They wouldn't listen. They just wouldn't listen." Elaine believed him.

They went back into school and talked to the other child involved, who owned up. Then she went to the three members of staff who'd been involved and told them that Alex was innocent and they went and apologised to him and subsequently, the other child involved also apologised to Alex.

I wonder what strikes you about that particular story. Well one thing is that Elaine really, really listened to Alex and she didn't prejudge the situation based on his past behaviour, and a habitual troublemaker learned what it feels like to be treated as if they'd never done anything wrong before, as if the past really is the past. She made sure that justice was done. She showed other people the ways of the King.

What was it about Elaine's school that three members of staff should apologise to a child?

Well, when Elaine arrived at the school, she decided the kind of culture that she wanted to create. She knew that many cultures end up being blame cultures, where people in authority never, ever apologise. She didn't want a blame culture, she wanted a forgiveness culture.



So right from the start she told parents, she told staff, she told the children that she'd make decisions but that she'd also probably make some mistakes. And if they didn't like something she did, then they should come and talk to her about it. And if she agreed, she would apologise and then go do something about it. And that's exactly what she's done.

So, what did Elaine do to mould that culture?

- She'd spotted a negative in her schools culture;
- She believed it could change;
- She identified a kingdom antidote;
- She gave it a try.

Yes, Elaine was the head teacher but you don't have to be in authority to mould the culture you're in. You don't have to be the boss, the parent or the team captain. Anyone can make a difference.

I wonder whether there's something you could try that would make a kingdom difference, make your frontline a better place to be, more like the way Jesus would like it to be.

So wherever you are this week, shalom.

