



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series

“Six Powerful Convictions about Healthy Culture”

October 8, 2018

Jeff Lockyer

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, where you’ll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that drives the ministry impact of your organization, your church, or your company, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. Now, here’s your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us again on the Flourishing Culture Podcast. In the next few minutes, you're going to learn six personal, powerful convictions that has turned a church culture and its ministries upside down. These six truths are so applicable to almost every church or Christian ministry you'll say, “Hey, wait. You're telling our story. You're talking about our struggles and our desire to improve the health of our culture.” The man with a remarkable story to tell you is Jeff Lockyer, the lead pastor of Southridge Community Church in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada. Hi, Jeff, and welcome to our podcast today.

Jeff Lockyer: Hey, Al. Great to be here again. You and I have started to develop a bit of a friendship here, so I'm really enjoying the chance to get to chat again.

Al: I feel the same way. Thanks, Jeff. And, you know, I've asked you if you'd share with our listeners the six powerful convictions that have transformed the Southridge culture. This is a message that you delivered just a few months ago at the Church Culture Conference last May. I'm really looking forward to our discussion.

Jeff: I appreciate being able to get into it. Just by way of context, these six convictions that you're alluding to, they were the result of a reflection exercise on the role and influence of appreciating culture

in my life and ministry. And at some level, they're not necessarily six convictions per se; they're more, I would say, six layers of growing appreciation of the importance of conviction, because my journey in the last, let's say, 10 or 15 years on this subject was from really total ignorance and apathy to any and all issues of culture to now, or in recent years, believing that a focus on culture is the single most critical contribution that a Christian leader can make. You know, those are very extreme perspectives, but, really, these six layers of conviction, or what you alluded to as the six convictions, they're just stages in that journey in my growing appreciation and understanding of how much culture matters.

Al: You know, and as I've thought about this, Jeff, they build on each other, don't they? That's really what you're saying.

Jeff: Absolutely, and they build on each other because I feel like God was building this appreciation in me, in my heart and in my mind and in the experience of the community where I lead and serve. And for sure, as you mentioned earlier, these are excruciatingly relevant in a local church context. They are equally as critical, I would say, in any organization or Christian ministry where a Christ-following leader wants to see the will of God done well.

Al: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Well, before we get into this any further, I'd really like our listeners to hear about the ministry distinctives of Southridge Community Church. I just love the way you serve your community.

Jeff: Our church, I guess in a nutshell, would be in classic terminology what you would call a multi-site missional church. So I think most people understand the idea of being multi-site. We're one church but in three different locations across the Niagara Region in Ontario, Canada, but we are also a missional church in the sense that our sites are primarily defined not by the building location or the service times; they're primarily defined by the specific difference of compassion and justice that we're seeking to make in those parts of the Niagara Region. And so each of our three locations is ultimately defined by what we call an anchor cause. That's its kind of social initiative that tries to make that difference. So one of our locations focuses on the anchor cause of homelessness and has the region's largest homeless shelter within our church facility. Another location serves low-income and at-risk families through a number of, again, primary programs. And one location focuses on migrant fruit-farm workers, particularly in the season that they're in and working in the Niagara Region. And so the Southridge dynamic is really about being the church in our neighborhoods, but our understanding of being the church is incarnation only making the life and love of Jesus real to other people.

Al: Oh, that's fantastic. As you've settled into your role as the senior pastor, or lead pastor, at Southridge, what was the culture challenge that you faced? What was the pain point that you really wanted to address?

Jeff: Yeah, originally, in this culture journey, Al, I guess embarrassingly there probably wasn't a pain point. I was probably aloof to the need to even care about this, until I heard in a talk once—a guy many of us have heard of, named Patrick Lencioni, talk about how culture eats strategy for breakfast. And that phrase gripped me because I would say without knowing it up until that point, everything in my ministry was focused on how we do things, which starting off, getting involved in the church that I grew up in as a kid, and taking it over with some buddies, some next-generation buddies, in our mid-20s, we were overhauling all kinds of ministry. And so the question we were constantly focusing on was, how ought we to “blank”? How ought we to do weekend services? How ought we to do discipleship? How ought we to do community life and small groups? How ought we to do global missions and compassion? How ought we to do evangelism? You get the idea.

And so the strategy question was really the only kind of conversation that as a leader I was used to having. I would assemble groups and meetings, and we would talk about strategy, until I heard Pat say that culture eats strategy for breakfast. And what Pat was suggesting was that there are ways of going about what you do as an organization that matter more than the work that you do as an organization. And so at the very, very entry level basics, things like having the right kinds of team meetings—you know, he wrote a book called *Death by Meeting*—

Al: Yeah.

Jeff: —that says the reason people hate meetings is because you have the wrong kinds of purposes being achieved through the wrong kinds of gatherings of people, the wrong kinds of meetings. So just squaring away your team meetings—all of the basics around individual performance management; having employees that have performance plans, having goals and metrics and accountabilities; setting up meeting rhythms of one-on-one performance management with regularity. I mean, we had none of that. We were very, you would call it, organic, which is unsophisticated and ignorant and just unaware of all this stuff.

Al: Yeah.

Jeff: But the more we started to pay attention to those things, to the very basics of attending to a culture, being a team, providing management, and things like that, all of a sudden, our effectiveness in making decisions and implementing strategies started to go through the roof, and you could palpably

feel this energy and momentum gain, because, as Pat said, you were focusing on something more important than strategy that was actually going to catalyze your strategy, and that was culture.

Al: Yeah.

Jeff: And so I would say for me it wasn't necessarily a pain as much as it was an opportunity that said, whoa, whoa, there's this thing called culture that I haven't been paying any attention to that may actually be a more important thing for me to start paying attention to than anything I formerly really cared about or paid attention to.

Al: Wow. And that really led to your first conviction then and what we're talking about here, and that's to really focus on culture to get the work done that you are working so hard to really plan and define.

Jeff: Yeah. It sounds pretty remedial, that culture helps you get work done, but if you're in the business of trying to get work done, again, church work, ministry work, nonprofit, marketplace, whatever, if you're in the business of getting work done and culture catalyzes that, well, then, focusing on culture actually enables your strategy to get delivered more effectively than just exclusively focusing on your strategy.

Al: Yeah. Well, that's great. Thanks, Jeff. Now, what would you say is a second conviction or a lesson about culture that hit home with you as you were gaining the appreciation for culture?

Jeff: Yeah, well, it's interesting. So you start to get on this horse and become sensitive to this dynamic called culture, and you're implementing some of these organizational basics of performance management and appropriate team meetings and whatever. And right away, or soon into that, you started to run into a bit of a roadblock, and that was the reaction of your people to the new accountabilities that were being provided to them, because all of a sudden, these church workers—and this, again, is true of any kingdom or Christian environment—these church workers were starting to buck against these feelings of expectation and accountability because to them that was foreign to how church ought to feel.

Al: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: And this conflict that, as you would get into these conversations, I could kind of understand what they were saying because the church is supposed to be so all-inclusive and unconditionally loving and permanent in our relationships, and yet there was this underlying sense of, we also are supposed to be accountable in it, it was, again, in the sovereignty of God and His grace for me and us—it was in a quiet time during my morning readings where I was just kind of grazing through the book of Romans, and

it, you know, Al, that the book of Romans, especially the first half, is pretty much the most sophisticated treatise of the vision of the life of Christ, especially in contrast to what Roman Jews understood as the Jewish tradition or the law. And it's this wonderful contrast between the kingdom and the law, or more specifically, the grace-based system of Jesus and the workspace system of the law. Well, all of a sudden, I'm reading in these contrasts, in Romans, chapter 4, where it says when people work, their wages aren't a gift, but—and you know how it goes on—

Al: Yeah.

Jeff: —in Christ, it's a free gift. And that phrase struck me, that even biblically, even the apostle Paul acknowledges when people work, their wages aren't a gift. And the aha for me was that employment works according to a different set of values and a different system than the church. And so in the world of church employment, you actually are embracing the coexistence of both systems. Because you're a church, you're embracing the grace-based system, but because in cases of employment, you're also an employer stewarding funds to deliver results. You're embracing the works-based system of employment, both fully, both completely.

And so where the grace-based system involves unconditional loving relationships, employment involves conditional relationships, conditional on whether you can do the job. A grace-based system involves a permanent lasting covenant. We're brothers and sisters in Christ, as a family of God, forever. An employment dynamic is contractual and only so long as the terms of the contract are being fulfilled, right? A grace-based system is rooted in love, where a works-based system, at some level, is based on accountabilities and assessments and even judgments.

And so it helped me to reconcile, when these people were starting to feel accountable, they were saying, "Oh, this feels too harsh," or "It feels too judged, and this isn't the way of Jesus." And certainly, the manner in which you deliver employment, you want to deliver in the way of Jesus, but it doesn't contravene, even biblically, it's not intended to contravene the basic laws of employment. And so the second kind of paradigm or layer of perspective on culture was that culture doesn't just help us get work done, it actually helps us get church work done or kingdom work done because paying attention to culture more rigorously is helping us understand how to navigate this dynamic of the grace-based and works-based system of kingdom or Christian employment.

Al: You know, I'm often challenged by individuals, employees, saying, "Oh, gosh, this sounds too corporate. We're getting to be too corporate, working in a Christian environment versus a grace-based approach." And I think you're articulated exactly what that dichotomy is, yeah.

Jeff: Yeah. And someone might disagree, but I feel like from the scriptures that any Christian organization or work environment ought to be fully corporate in the sense that it's fully professional and seeking to fully effectively steward the resources that are entrusted to it. That's God's expectation. And Jesus talks about in Luke 19, the parable of the talents. We're actually going to be accountable one day for the return on investment based on all of the facets of resources that God as King has entrusted to us in this finite time that he's given us on Earth. So I think, at some level, we ought to be fully professional and fully effective in that regard while at the same time living out the visions and values of the way of Jesus in the manner in which we do that.

So, I mean, speaking practically, I don't believe that people in Christian ministry environments ought to be exempt from getting fired. I think that firings ought to be just as appropriate, when necessary, as hirings—

Al: Yeah.

Jeff: —irrespective of faith or not faith. Obviously, the manner in which you would terminate employment in a situation should feel and should be enacted differently because of the reality of the presence of Jesus in you, but it's not a denouncing of that works-based system.

Al: Yeah, absolutely. Now, your third lesson, Jeff, is very interesting, and it's maybe even a little messy to bring up. It's absolutely key to building a flourishing culture. Tell us what that is.

Jeff: Yeah. So, again, in the journey, we're kind of moving along and we're starting to gain some clarity on the coexistence of these systems and implementing performance-management team meetings, all these structures more effectively. And over time, we started to realize that one of the most pervasive challenges we were facing was of employees who—all we could say, all we could articulate, was that they just didn't fit. They just didn't fit. None of the other employment initiatives and procedures that we were applying made sense of why things weren't working out. It was just this gut feel that they didn't fit. And, again, right around that time, we were hearing how important it was, from Patrick Lencioni, to kind of discern what he called your cultural distinctives, what is unique about how you do your work that will determine whether a person fits or doesn't fit? And, you know, for me, up until that point, Al, I probably would have bucked against that, theologically.

Al: Mm-hmm.

Jeff: I would have assumed that the church was a place where everybody ought to belong, that there shouldn't be sort of one type or one fit, but it's supposed to be this all-inclusive place of unity amidst as much diversity as possible. I think what Pat helped understand was that in employment, so not in our

community, but in a workplace culture, there is such a thing as a fit, where even when you compare local churches themselves, yes, they're all all-inclusive, but each of them has a kind of a subculture where people will thrive or struggle to varying degrees according to this intangible called fit.

So what we did in trying to embrace that for ourselves is we went on a senior-leadership-team retreat, and we spent the entire two and a half days focused on this one topic. So we had a multiple-session agenda, focused exclusively on this topic. And the first session was kind of fascinating. The first session was for every senior-leadership-team member to share with the group the staff member that they felt on the one hand was the best fit and on the other hand was the worst fit, representing who we were. And what was fascinating—I thought this was going to be this huge debate and all kinds of argument—there were only two people who were kind of put forward as best-fit models and only two people put forward as worst-fit models, meaning there was quite a degree of agreement in alignment around who these people were. I would suggest, as a bit of a disclaimer, that you don't necessarily do this in public to begin with. It can get quite contentious, but it was a private environment of our senior leaders. From there, though, we said, “Okay, what are the reasons why we feel like certain people are a good fit and certain people are a poor fit?” From there, the next session was distilling some of the commonalities of those reasons and realizing, not surprisingly, I'm sure, that the very reasons that someone we felt was a good fit were the inverse reasons why someone was a bad fit. They were the same reasons, just upside down. And so, then, the final stage was kind of distilling them down into these core themes and trying to wordsmith them for clarity a little bit. And what we did is by the end of it, we had five cultural distinctives that may not apply to Best Christian Workplace Institute, and your workplace environment may not apply to another church or nonprofit or sales company or whatever, but in the context of Southridge Community Church are quite distinctive to what it would mean for a person to fit or not fit. So for bonus footage, I'll give them to you.

Number one, we're fanatically collaborative, which means we identify as a we and an us, and we never make a decision independently. We're always making a decision in some group of people. Number two is that we're never satisfied. We have a *Citius Altius Fortius* culture that's always striving to get better and even can err on the side of overly critical at times because we want to be iron that sharpens iron. Number three is that we totally own this. We are owners of our ministry, not just hirelings, which means, number one, that we own the life that we're inviting people into. We are, as staff members, all in to this life of devotion to Jesus. Number two, though, as employees, we're enacting an ownership mentality not a union mentality, no matter what our ministry position is. Value, number four, or distinctive number four, is that we're oriented to outsiders and even would have some aversion to the stereotypical Christian subculture. And value number five is what we call “we go there,” meaning we

don't let conflict fester, but we are quick to address issues and to try to talk to people instead of about them and seeking to resolve them in as expedient and as healthy as a way possible.

Al, for us, when we brought this exercise back and shared with our people these five cultural distinctives, it was a watershed moment in our organization. I can't overstate it, because it provided for people articulation for why it was that they so tracked with our culture and why they tracked with working in our organization, or it provided them the clarity and the light-bulb reasons as to why they didn't. And people were able to align more fully with the culture, or they were able to self-select out and identify with a culture where they would thrive to a greater degree, and they're much happier because of that. And so for us it wasn't so much at this point about helping us get work done or get even church or kingdom work done, now it's building on the experience in helping us get kingdom work done in an aligned way. So it was really a powerful experience for us.

Al: Wow. Not only an aligned way, but doing it together as a group, working as a community.

Jeff: Exactly, yeah.

Al: Right.

Jeff: Now, we're able to get work done that happens to be kingdom work done, and we can get this kingdom work done together as one.

Al: We all know that, I mean, I think we're designed this way, we can get more done together, and that's why we have organizations, just for that purpose, yeah.

I trust you're enjoying our podcast. We'll be right back after this brief word about a valuable tool that can pinpoint the true, measurable health of your culture.

Male: What if you could get an upper hand on unwanted turnover, relationship conflicts, struggling morale, and unproductive staff, and, at the same time, increase the effectiveness and impact of your organization? You can with the Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. This popular, proven resource pinpoints the true health of your workplace culture and ways to improve it.

You'll get a detailed breakout summary of the eight essential ways your culture and your organization can flourish, all from a principled, practical, faith-based approach that works. Join the more than 800 satisfied organizations, churches, and Christian-owned businesses who have said, "Yes." Sign up online today at bcwinstitute.org/survey. The Best Christian Workplaces Employee Engagement Survey. It's your first important step on the road to a flourishing culture.

Al: All right. Now, let's hear more from today's guest.

Well, this has been just fabulous. So, we've gone through three. What's the fourth conviction and lesson about culture that you grew to appreciate in this journey?

Jeff: Yeah, so, by this point in our journey, we're starting to take culture pretty seriously, and all of a sudden, we hear about this thing—not to toot your horn, but I will, Al—called the Best Christian Workplace Institute. And we had never done an assessment of our culture, but we thought, hey, we'll give it a shot and see what it says. When you think of all of the gains that God had already made in our culture, you might have assumed that we would score really favorably. But as you know, in your scoring system there are some key benchmarks of threshold between healthy and toxic, a baseline for healthy, and then a threshold between healthy and flourishing. And in this five-point scale, 4.00 represents the minimum for health, and the first time we did this as an organization, that's what we scored. We scored 4.00, what someone once called kissing-your-sister level healthy.

Al: You got there by the skin of your teeth, right.

Jeff: We did. And it's interesting because once we parsed it out into different components of your flourish model and different departments, we realized that there was actually some good, some bad, and some ugly. And so we were able over successive years, as a senior leadership and as departments and ultimately as a board, to look at some of the key weaknesses—we've done other podcasts where we've talked about this strategy called the bottleneck approach, and said, "What are the one or two main, main weaknesses here, the biggest bottlenecks, and how could we fix those this year and then see where we score the next year?"

And so over now six or so years, we've gone from a cumulative score, I believe 4.00, to 4.20 to 4.32 to 4.52 to 4.56 to last winter it was 4.58. And in each one of those, it's just been the result of focusing on the main weaknesses that the assessment has surfaced and trying to improve those so that we can kind of raise the cultural tide of our organization.

The coolest thing of all is that in the last two years we've been able to see every single one of our departments in the segmented analysis exceed that 4.25 barrier of flourishing. And so for the last two years we've been able to have the confidence that everyone we invite into our employ can know that no matter where they're working at Southridge, they're going to be plugging into a team where they can experience a thriving workplace culture, and so, it's been quite gratifying.

And I would say more than anything, Al—I've shared this to you both privately and publicly before—what the survey does numerically is illustrates what you can feel palpably, and you can't really put

words to it beforehand, but you can feel it. I know what a 3.8 borderline culture feels like. I know what those meetings feel like. I know what those staff concerns feel like. I know what those interactions walking down the hall feel like. I know what that feels like. I know what a 4.1 feels like. I know what a 4.6 feels like. And at a staff retreat or at a social event and the heart-felt enjoyment of the privilege of being able to do this together, I know what all those different kind of levels or categories feel like, and so, I couldn't be more convinced in the value of leveraging an instrument like this to help you pay attention to culture to an even greater degree, because in this era, we learned that focusing on culture in this way not only helps you get work done, it not only helps you get kingdom work done, not only helps you get it done together, it helps you get kingdom work done together through engaged people. And the difference between disengaged people and engaged people is like the difference between a lightning bug and lightning. It's incomparable.

Al: Yeah, wow. You know, and, Jeff, you just outlined scores over a number of years that you've taken the survey. You know, what's the advantage from your perspective of actually taking the survey and having this checkup on an annual basis versus skipping years, or another approach. What would you say is the advantage?

Jeff: Well, I think there's two advantages. One is just the raw data, because so much changes during the year that you don't really know. So the raw data, I've heard it described that facts are your friends. It's painful to look at sometimes, but facts are your friends. And so in the raw data, like I said, in the way that it quantifies something that otherwise is just a palpable feel, there's value there. The bigger value, though, to your question, is that you're about direction more than perfection. And so you can celebrate the growth, you can focus on growth, you can employ growth mentality to the whole process. It becomes far less of an instant and of a discouragement or encouragement based on just the raw data, it's the journey, more importantly, that you get to focus on.

Al: So, we've talked about the four principles so far, and, you know, I think working together through people who are engaged, that's the fourth. Now, let's go on to the fifth conviction and lesson that you've experienced over time. Tell us about that.

Jeff: Similar to a number of the other four, this fifth one wasn't pretty at first, and at some level it was triggered through some of the data that BCWI was initially providing. One of the kind of subscales or weaknesses that we observed was that there was quite a discrepancy between the cultural experience of men and women. There was quite a discrepancy. And, I mean, that may confuse you as to why. It's the same organization, doing the same thing, same departments. And, thankfully, again, in the sovereignty of God, right around that time, he had connected us with a woman about three hours away from us, north of Toronto, Ontario, named Ellen Duffield. And she's part of a ministry called Muskoka

Woods. That's a summer camp but also doubles as a leadership development ministry. And she'd done PhD research on the empowerment of women and particularly the empowerment of women in Christian subcultures.

And her research basically discovered a couple key things. First of all, that culturally, not even just in the Christian subculture, but just in society, a woman's confidence peaks at age 9. And by that point, they begin to go on a very distinct journey from men, by and large, where men will typically continue on to defaulting to confidence where women will begin to increasingly default towards insecurity. And that differentiation is fundamental in how adult men and women work and work together. The other thing that she discovered was that the climate, the underlying conditions by which men and women thrive, are different. So where men may like a little bit more competitive environment, women thrive in a more collegial environment. Where men want to assert themselves, women want to be invited in and have their voice invited as opposed to assert, little practical things like that.

Well, I'm summarizing what has been a 7 or 8 year journey for us. The bottom line for us was that we realized we needed to provide both disproportionate invitation for women and a disproportionate investment into women for us to see both men and women thrive in our workplace and ultimately in our church. The vision that we had back in the day working with Ellen was that we could become a community where spiritual moms and spiritual dads could parent the family together. So it was a female empowerment movement that we were starting to try to get men and women leading together well.

Strategically, or practically, we initiated two kinds of things. One was a leadership development initiative called next-level leadership for our two dozen most senior leaders, and every two years we launch a new cohort of what we call next-level leadership for another two dozen senior leaders in our midst. The other thing that we've launched is what we call Brave Girls, which is trying to nip that confidence issue in the bud and take sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade girls who are in junior high and to spend three years of progressive investment, building into them through retreats and regular connections and mentorships and small-group work and whatnot so that we can reverse the tide of that trajectory shifting towards insecurity.

Al, I'm going to tell you, between those two investments, things have been revolutionary. We've seen young women enter high school with more confidence than young women were formally graduating from high school. We're seeing baptisms that we never saw before, so we're even seeing spiritual gains like that at a statistical level. Fifty percent of our staff now are female. Fifty percent of our six-person senior leadership team is female. Our board of elders chair is a female. And for the very first time in our 2018 BCWI survey, the women scored higher than the men.

Al: Wow.

Jeff: And so we have gone now from a stark discrepancy in cultural experiences through feeling like we're seeing evidence that both men and women are experiencing this equally to now the women scoring their workplace cultural experience at Southridge even higher than the guys.

Al: And that has been a complete flip, hasn't it, over the last five years.

Jeff: Yeah, well, I'm hoping that we're not oppressing the guys now, but it certainly has us realizing the latent potential of our female members, our female leaders to a greater degree. And I know in church work specifically there is the theological caveat on whether you land in a complementary place or in an egalitarian place. I don't intend to get into the complexity of the theological nuances between those two positions today. All I'll say is that from our perspective, it built our conviction even further on the value of culture because now we're seeing culture help us get work done, get kingdom work done, get kingdom work done better together, get it done better together through engaged people, and now get kingdom work done better together through engaged people who are all realizing their potential. And we're seeing the best of everyone, not just the best of a certain subset of our population.

Al: Yeah, okay, Jeff. Now, we've got one more, the sixth level of appreciation when it comes to culture. What would be this sixth lesson?

Jeff: Yeah, the sixth lesson, I would say, at some levels is really the lesson, and the other ones I feel have just been a stepping stone towards that, because for me the sixth lesson would simply be a reflection on the other five lessons. And when I take a step back and when as senior leaders we take a step back and watch what God has done through these five different eras of growing our appreciation and focus on issues of culture, at the end of the day, what we've seen is God transforming us from the inside out. We've seen God changing us into a greater likeness of his Son. We've seen God engage in a fuller and more complete way his business of sanctification. And more importantly, what we've seen as a result of him doing that work is we've seen a greater enjoyment and experience of the realities of the fruit of his spirit—things like love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control, all those attributes—that bottom line has resulted in a greater degree of the experience of the kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven.

And it's caused us to kind of reframe everything in this regard, Al, because as kingdom leaders, in our case as local church leaders, but again, here's if you're leading a nonprofit or Christian ministry or you're just a Christian business person or a Christian teacher in a school or a Christian politician or a Christ follower in a marketplace kind of vocation, our ultimate calling is to usher in the realities of

heaven on Earth, in our circles, in our lifetime. It's to usher in the realities of the kingdom on Earth. And as we reflect back and realize that the greatest way that God has ushered in around our church, the greatest way that God has ushered in the realities of his kingdom has actually not been through the programs and ministries of our church; the greatest ways that God has ushered in the realities of his kingdom on Earth around us as it is in heaven has been through the transformational work he's done through us paying attention to culture.

So that's why I said at the beginning the journey for us was of total ignorance and apathy towards issues of culture to now fundamentally believing that attending to culture is, without overstating it, Al, it is the single most important thing a Christian leader can care about because it's the greatest difference maker or the greatest contributor to the bottom-line core business of any Christian in vocation, and that is to usher in the realities of the kingdom of God on Earth in our context as it is in heaven. And so I don't want to get too preachy, but you can certainly hear my heart ramp up—

Al: —in the sense that this has been the deal-breaking lesson of all for us and is what makes us now white hot on issues of culture, no matter what we're doing, because as a church, in our ministries, in our departments, in our programs and our events and initiatives, everything that we're doing is trying to help expose the Niagara Region to the wonder of the person of Jesus Christ by palpably bringing the reality of the kingdom of God to Niagara as it is in heaven. But we know and have learned now over the last decade and a half or so that the single most significant way in which we do that is by paying attention to culture in every possible way that we can.

Al: You know, of course, that starts with leaders, doesn't it.

Jeff: It starts in the way that God works, which is from the inside out, and it starts with God in his redemptive plan on Earth. It started with him in sending his Son to Earth. As he works in people, it starts from the inside out in people. As he works in communities, it starts inside out with leaders in an apostle Paul “follow me as I follow Christ” kind of a way.

So, for those who are listening and thinking about the influence that you have, before you send this podcast to your supervisor or your spouse or some friend that you think could really benefit from this, stop and reflect on what you feel like God might want to say to you, because in every regard, Al, it does, starts with you and me. First things first.

Al: Yeah. Wow, Jeff, this has been great. I really appreciate you sharing this with us, and I'm going to ask you, given all you've experienced in the transformation and greater health of your culture and the

six layers of growing appreciation for culture, give us one final thought that you'd like to leave with ministry readers. You know, maybe it's a question that gets to the heart of what you've shared with us.

Jeff: Yeah, I think if I was to leave this conversation with one question to church leaders, ministry leaders, leaders of nonprofits, and Christ-following leaders in the marketplace, the question would be some version of, what do you fundamentally believe your ministry is on Earth? To church leaders I would specify it maybe more specifically, what do you believe the purpose of your church is on Earth? Because I think that if we're honest with ourselves and reflect on what we believe our ultimate ministry is, our ultimate ministry, no matter what kind of vocation we're in, it's to bring the reality of Jesus to life to a greater degree, to make real his life and love in the world. And that's just another way of saying, to bring and usher in the realities of the kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven. And so if you can really camp out and maybe have a personal reflection or a team meeting around that question, what do you believe your primary ministry is, I think clarifying that question can motivate and drive you to now a ministry of caring about culture to a far greater degree than perhaps you did, because you'll appreciate that culture is the single greatest contributor to achieving that ministry, to ushering in the reality of the kingdom of God on Earth as it is in heaven in your context.

Al: Fantastic. All right, Jeff Lockyer, lead pastor, Southridge Community Church, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, thank you for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories, and thank you for extending your ministry to leaders who have been listening and benefitting from all you've shared with us today. Thanks, Jeff.

Jeff: Well, Al, thank you so much for having me. And more importantly, thank you and for your ministry and your organization for being that agent that God has used many times in my life and in our ministry to teach us about the appreciation of culture. I can't put into words how fundamentally your ministry has transformed me and our context, and so any time I can give a little bit of that back and share what God's done through you guys, I'm happy to do that.

Al: Yeah, thanks.

And I want to thank you, our listeners, for joining us on the Flourishing Culture Podcast and for investing this time in your workplace culture today. If there's a significant insight—and Jeff has given you several—if there's a story, or an action step that you've enjoyed in the past few minutes, please share them with others so that they might benefit as well, and please, review the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

This program is copyrighted by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute. All rights reserved. Our writer is Mark Cutshall, our social media assistant is Solape Osoba, and this is Al Lopus, reminding you that a healthy culture drives greater impact and growth for your organization. And I'll see you again soon on the Flourishing Culture Podcast.

Male: For a free transcript of today's podcast, visit blog.bcwinstitute.org. Join us next week for another one-to-one interview with a respected Christian leader. The Flourishing Culture Podcast with Al Lopus is a presentation of the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, helping Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.