



The Flourishing Culture Podcast Series
“How to Become a Spiritually Vibrant Leader”
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Steve Macchia

Male: Welcome to the Flourishing Culture Podcast, brought to you by the Best Christian Workplaces Institute, helping Christian organizations set the standard as the best, most effective places to work in the world.

This is the podcast where you’ll learn how to build a flourishing workplace culture that can take your organization to the next level. In the next few minutes, you’ll hear practical insights to create employee engagement that drives the effectiveness and impact of your organization, your church, or your company. Now here’s your host, BCWI president, Al Lopus.

Al Lopus: Hello, and thanks for joining us today. Our research tells us that spiritual leadership is a key aspect of creating an effective team and culture in churches and Christian organizations. This leads to the obvious question. What are some of the best practices for a leader to cultivate a vibrant spirituality on their leadership team? Is your team experiencing vibrant spirituality?

Well, to help us with this topic today, we have the pleasure of talking with the Reverend Dr. Steve Macchia, the founder and president of Leadership Transformations, Inc. He’s also the director of the Pierce Center for Disciple-Building at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He teaches spiritual replenishment as an adjunct faculty member at Phoenix Seminary, which is a certified Best Christian Workplace. He’s also the author of several books, including his most recent, *Broken and Whole*, published by Best Christian Workplace InterVarsity Press. Hi, Steve, and welcome to our podcast today.

Steve Macchia: Thank you, Al. Great to be with you, brother. I’ve looked forward to this.

Al: I’m looking forward to this too, and I think it’ll be very helpful for our listeners. I’m looking forward to what you have to share to help our listeners see the clear advantages and benefits of creating a spiritually vibrant team, but first, tell us a little bit about yourself and your work at LTI and Gordon-Conwell.

Steve: Thanks, Al. My ministry life spans about four decades now. It's hard to believe. I started as a member of the pastoral staff at Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts. I had four different pastoral roles there during the 11 years I was on the staff. Then I went to a group called the Evangelistic Association of New England. During my tenure, we renamed that Vision New England. I was there for 14 years. Fourteen years ago, in July of 2003, my wife and I started this ministry called Leadership Transformations.

It really grew out of a vision and passion that I have, and have had for many years now, to prioritize the care and nurture of the soul and to help leaders do likewise. A real key behind who we are and what we're all about is coming alongside leaders and teams and helping them push away all of the other distractions of leadership and make sure they're really taking care of their soul, their walk with God, and become spiritually vibrant leaders as well as spiritually vibrant teams.

I love everything I get to do. More importantly, I love who I get to do it with. I've always said if you're on a solid team working with the right people who share a common vision and mission you can conquer any hill in front of you if you have the right heart to do so.

Al: Steve, who are you working with? Is it largely pastors, other Christian leaders? What's your target group?

Steve: Our target group would be primarily pastors and leadership teams and local churches, but we also work with presidents and leaders of Christian organizations and their boards. We also work with denominational leaders and their networks of leaders who are scattered throughout their various denominations. So our focus is Christian leaders and primarily church and parachurch ministries.

Al: When we met, you were doing a workshop to teach people how to use your tool to measure the health of the church. Tell us a little bit about that.

Steve: Yeah, that's our Church Health Assessment Tool. The short name is CHAT. Basically, that tool is designed as a listening tool, similar to what you do in your work with Best Christian Workplaces. We feel that it's important that leaders listen to fellow leaders as well as their congregation. That Church Health Assessment Tool was designed around the principles from my first book, *Becoming a Healthy Church*. We take the 10 traits of a vital church and spell them out into a comprehensive tool that helps leaders and their leadership teams listen to the congregation. It's a wonderful tool. Hundreds of churches have used it over the past decade or so.

Al: That's fantastic. As you work with church leaders and future church leaders with your work there at Gordon-Conwell, what key need or challenge are they facing, and what do you set out to achieve as you work with them?

Steve: Well, we set out to help them advance their attentiveness to the Spirit of God, the movement of God, the Word of God, the life of prayer, and really try to help them prioritize their soul, which I believe is the most neglected part of a person today. We live in an age of distraction, where people are more interested in what's going on in their cell phone and their Facebook account and their Twitter account than they are what's going on in the depths of their soul. What we really try to do is help

people press the “pause” button and go deeper into listening to God and to one another and find that remarkable things happen when we, as leaders, learn how to listen.

Al: We’ve heard over and over again in these podcasts the only thing leaders have to bring is themselves, and it really starts at their heart and soul, as you say.

Steve: It really does. I couldn’t agree more.

Al: Steve, in your book *Becoming a Healthy Team*, you share your passion for working with teams, and as you describe it, your passion has grown out of genuine love for people and an earnest desire to see them flourish...flourish in their life in Christ and in context of their service to Christ and within the community of this church. As you can tell, this is a podcast, as we’re calling it, the Flourishing Culture Podcast. As a leader, you talk a lot about a leader’s priority mission and a leader’s intimacy with God. Why do you place such a high priority on this, and what does it look like in a team environment?

Steve: I can’t think of a higher priority than my walk with God and my depth of intimacy with Christ. That really is where it all begins and ends and everything in between. The way in which I’m walking with Christ is evident in the way in which I’m walking with those around me. We have a little truism that says, “As the leader goes, so goes the organization, but more importantly, as the soul of the leader goes, so goes the leader.”

This ever-deepening intimacy with Christ is what our continual pursuit is, and it is our sanctifying experience as well, as men and women of God. Are we becoming more like Christ in our attitudes and our actions and the words we use and the way in which we’re making decisions regarding our lives and our shared life in ministry? I think it is the most important part of flourishing for an individual, as well as for a team, and ultimately for the organization.

Al: I love that. “As the soul goes, so goes the leader.”

Steve: That’s so true.

Al: In your book *Becoming a Healthy Team*, you define five traits of vital leadership. Can you give us a summary of those five traits?

Steve: Basically, it spells out the word *TEAMS*. It grows from a study of the book of 1 Corinthians, primarily chapter 12, where Paul is writing to a very troubled church, a very divided church, and he’s urging them to be united as a body. If you look at chapter 12, that word *body* is repeated 17 times. Any Bible student knows they’d better pay attention when they’re seeing a word once or twice or three or four times, but when it’s 17 times, you’d better wake up to that reality.

What he’s really saying is, “I want you to be one. I want you to be a unified body, a team.” From that passage... In the book I describe how we gleaned all of these five principles from that passage. It’s basically healthy teams *trust* (that’s *T*), healthy teams *empower* (that’s *E*), healthy teams *assimilate* (that’s *A*), healthy teams *manage* (that’s *M*), and healthy teams *serve* (that’s the *S*). So *trust, empowerment,*

assimilation, management, and service. Those are the five. We articulate them much further in the book, and each chapter spells those out in more detail.

Al: Those are great terms. It makes a great book, for sure.

Steve: A nice easy outline to remember.

Al: In my experience working with Christian ministries, churches, even parachurch mission organizations and educational institutions, I've heard mixed messages about the role of spirituality and its role in the workplace and on teams, for that matter.

I've heard some leaders say they have a policy, "Pray on your own time," or in parachurch missions they say, "We want our people to work while they're at work, and their spiritual growth is the responsibility of their church." In fact, I was just at a well-known church last week where they said that. What are your thoughts about the priority of a team and their ability to share their spiritual lives with one another?

Steve: That's a great question. I do think we are to pray on our own time. That's obviously to be a priority, but I also think we're to pray together on work time. What I mean by that is not that we're spending entire days every day as if there's no work to be done. Obviously, there's work to be done, but there are occasions on a regular basis and even during what I would describe as time-out times, where we're just taking time away, going on retreat...

We just had a retreat at my home today with one of the teams I lead from the seminary, and we spent the entire day together, just six of us, and the majority of the time was around prayer and sharing and listening to one another's stories. We didn't have an agenda beyond that. Some would say, "What a waste of time that is," and I would say I respectfully disagree. I think it is *the* most important time.

We leave a day like this, and we are more committed to one another, more authentic with one another, so in the day-to-day work we do side by side, we know we trust one another. We love one another. We have prayed together. We have listened to each other's stories. We have cried with one another. We have been empathic toward one another's stories. Out of the depth of that love for each other, as I've said earlier, you can accomplish great feats together.

But if you don't know each other, if you haven't prayed together, if you haven't heard each other talk about the true aspects of their lives, their hurt, their pain, their heartache, their disappointment, as well as their joys and delights... I mean, how much do we really know of each other? Then it's a functional relationship. I don't want to do that. Frankly, that's not an interest of mine.

I don't want to just have a functional relationship with the people around me. I want to have a meaningful, spiritual relationship with them. So I agree. I pray on my own time. I need to have my prayer time, my prayer cave, my prayer chair, my prayer corner, however you want to describe it, but when I'm with my brothers and sisters and we're co-laboring together and we have a heart for the work we're called to, I sure hope we're praying together.

Al: That's great. When you stand back and look at all of the teams you've worked with, what's the best improvement or difference it has made in an organization to have a team that's really spiritually vibrant?

Steve: I very freely will say without trust there is no team. It's the very first letter of *TEAMS*. It's the first priority. I say to folks we work with, "If you have distrust on the team, halt almost everything else you're doing and rebuild that trust. Do everything you possibly can to rebuild that trust." If you don't have trust for one another, if that has gone haywire, there's not going to be much you're going to do together that's going to be effective, nor is it going to be richly and abundantly blessed by God.

I think God wants us to be united. I think Jesus' prayer in John 17 and this passage and all of Paul's writings in the New Testament are all about unity. It's about bringing the people of God together, and it begins in the central core of a leader and a leadership team's life. We do a lot just in terms of how to rebuild trust, how to resolve conflict. Sometimes we're successful, sometimes we're not, but we do the best we can to help them prioritize it.

Al: How about a favorite before or after story? Do you have an example of a team that wasn't working well and then all of a sudden, through some of this work, really came together?

Steve: When I think of that I think of a couple teams in particular, church teams that before we went on retreat, for example, were at great odds with one another, and then spending a couple of days on retreat together, praying, laughing, eating, and sharing with one another, all of a sudden the tide turns completely, and then the unity that's experienced from the retreat is carried back into life together.

Those before and after stories are plentiful, because we really see it's important to do a retreat that's specifically a spiritual retreat. It has no other agenda except the care and nurture of the soul. If you add more things to do on those retreats, they're really not retreats; they're work hours. The best stories I have are the ones that grew out of prayer, out of reunifying, out of tears, out of shared story, out of a willingness to be honest and authentic with one another.

Al: You're speaking to several hundred leaders right now on this podcast. What affirmation would you most want to share with them about creating a culture where vibrant spirituality is present and really core and primary among the leaders and staff of a church team or a Christian organization?

Steve: The first thing I would say is "Be willing to go there yourself." Be willing to be authentic with the ones who are around you. Be willing to say, "I don't have it all figured out." Be willing to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me." Be willing to say, "I love you." Be willing to say, "I'm learning. I'm still in process. God is not done with me yet." Be willing to share a story as appropriate. Not just to everybody, but as appropriate, to be able to share a story of struggle or a real need you have for God to do a deep work in you.

I think the key is for you as leader to be authentic. The more authentic you are, the deeper the team will go. If you are holding back, if you're withholding, if you're not being honest, if you're doing pretense more than authenticity, that'll negatively impact your effectiveness on your team. So I think it all begins with the leader.

AI: We have this factor *inspirational leadership*, and it starts with the Christian character of a leader. You have a lot of folks who work with you to help build into and develop, where leaders develop their own Christian character. What are some of the disciplines you recommend? Teams certainly participate in offsites, but for an individual leader to build their own soul, to build their own level of Christian character, what are some of the disciplines you recommend?

Steve: I'll say to folks, "Put on your contemplative on occasion." You don't have to always be active. You don't always have to be verbal. You don't always have to be the know-it-all. You don't have to always be the one in charge. Put on the contemplative. What I mean by that is do some listening. Do some attentiveness in your own spiritual life. Do some journaling. Do some personal reflection. Ask questions of others, similar to your 360.

Ask questions of others that would give you truthful answers about yourself, and recognize that if that's their perception, it also is your reality. Even if it's painful, and I've had many of those over the years... Even when persons are telling me how they're perceiving me and it's painful for me to hear that, I still want to be able to say, "Lord, what granular or huge rock of truth do I need to receive in this? Is it something small? Is it something large? Is there something hindering my effectiveness?"

The disciplines I would say are all introspective, if you will. That's where I would begin. Then from there, it would be make sure you have spiritual friendship so that people are speaking into your life and have people who love you enough to be honest with you. If you have people around you who love you enough to be honest with you, then you know you're in good company, because they are willing to share life with you and be honest with you.

Again, it goes back to authenticity, being authentic before God, being authentic toward others, and then inviting authenticity among your team. If you don't have that, then you're really just punching in, punching out, doing agenda, fulfilling a responsibility, and it doesn't have much meaning and much depth to it. That's for sure.

AI: Do you recommend that teams go off site on an annual basis? I suppose there isn't any specific... It depends on the team, but...

Steve: I would say at minimum, annually. If you can a couple of times a year be able to do that, that would be awesome. I would say the more time you give to that, the more you get out of it. If it's just a half day a year, it's not going to be anywhere close to two full days a year, and it's going to be double or even quadruple that if you do it a couple of times a year. I've seen that over and over as well.

The leader needs to be comfortable with the fact that we want to take some time just for meaningful spiritual vitality, knowing that the work will get done. We can do the work other times, other ways. You don't always have to bring all the work with you on a retreat. No, give people a break. Have them take a nap and go take a walk and play and enjoy leisurely meals together. There's so much more to meaningful relationships than work. So stop doing all that work and put it down for a while.

AI: I think rationale there is that because you're closer, you're working more cohesively as a result of this deep fellowship, you actually get more done and are more innovative.

Steve: You are more creative, more innovative. It's that concept of assimilation. One plus one never equals two. One plus one is always three or more, because it just multiplies right before your very eyes. I think that's the spiritual life anyway. The Spirit of God loves to multiply what we do, not just add one to one to one. I've seen the tremendous value of deep meaningful relationships for the sake of effective ministry and service to others. They go hand in glove.

Al: I'd be interested, Steve... You mentioned, "Be contemplative." In your 40 years of ministry, have you seen a shift (particularly, our audience is Protestant) where Protestant leaders are becoming more contemplative in their spiritual discipline in their own journey?

Steve: Yeah, absolutely. I think the whole spiritual formation movement that has really grown over the past 25 to 30 years is case in point. A lot of evangelicals are realizing they're so activist that they forget the interior life. I would say as an evangelical that if I prioritize my inner life, the ministry and mission is much more meaningful, because it comes out of an inside-out approach rather than an outside-in approach. That's a dramatically different approach.

It's like if I'm going to go deeper with God and deeper with those around me, if we are going to be in touch with the Spirit of God's movement in us, through us, and around us, we'll be more attentive to the needs of others, and the service to others is multiplied. A lot of people misinterpret spiritual formation as if it's navel-gazing. No, it isn't. Spiritual formation at its finest is service to others that comes out of a deep reservoir of a life with God.

Al: And without that reservoir then your efforts clearly are shallow or certainly don't go as far.

Steve: Yeah. There's a difference between being a canal and a reservoir. A reservoir is deep. A canal you just go right through. That's an ancient truth. It comes from our forefathers and mothers. What we're trying to do at LTI is bring to the modern day all of those beautiful ancient practices that predate the Reformation when we became know-it-alls and started doing our own thing and reforming.

What do we have now? Like 40,000 denominations worldwide since the Reformation. It's because if we don't like what's going on down the street, we start something brand new. Yet there's something about finding those places where we are connected and unified to one another. I would hope it's the biblical text, I would hope it's the centrality of Christ, and I would hope it's a life of prayer. My job is to be a carer of souls. That's my job as a minister of the gospel. Anyone in ministry, that's your job. You're caring for souls. It begins with knowing how to care for your own.

Al: Absolutely. The second thing you mentioned after a contemplative practice is around spiritual friendships. Pastors, leaders are often feeling... They say they feel alone. Certainly, they can't share with their team issues they're going through. How do you recommend people in these leadership roles create spiritual friendships?

Steve: Oh, can we do another podcast on that someday, Al? I would love to explore that further. This is a huge topic, and I do think a lot of leaders are very lonely. We need at least one or two really rock solid friendships that can help us navigate the wider world, because it's a mean, nasty world out there, and even Christians can be mean and nasty to one another.

If you don't have a place to go, a person to sit with, to talk with... Of course you'd want your wife or your husband if it's in family, but I think even beyond that, we guys need other men, our wives need other women. We need each other, and I think the biblical text is just filled with great examples of spiritual friendships.

When you think of Jonathan and David. When you think of Ruth and Naomi, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. When you think of Paul and Barnabas, who goes to second seat while Paul becomes the dominant one. Look at what he did to save John Mark and probably the gospel of Mark because of Barnabas' friendship with John Mark on the heels of the split between him and Paul. I mean, there's story after story after story of how ministry has been saved because of friendship.

Most leaders get into trouble when they have no friends, and then they make stupid decisions and find out, "Oh my gosh. Look at what I have just done. I thought I would never be the one to do that." Well, it's because we had no meaningful touch points with people we would feel safe with. Gosh, it's a huge need, Al, a huge need out there today.

Al: Well, maybe we'll come back and have that podcast.

Steve: That would be great.

Al: Good idea, Steve. I love your advice. Personal contemplative, introspective practice, journaling, listening, getting advice, getting input from others as we develop our own spiritual formation, and then that spiritual friendship with one or two really close friends we can bounce things off of and even inspire each other to greater ministry.

Steve: I would say out of those two places we learn how to be spiritually discerning leaders. Discernment is another big topic. In retrospect, I would say it's the dominant issue for teams to deal with. It's like, "How do we make decisions?" Do we make decisions on a business model or do we make decisions around a spiritual discernment model? Is there a way to combine those two or are they two separate worlds? So another podcast, Al. That's a big topic as well and a passion of mine. I think we need to become spiritually discerning leaders and leadership teams, and it comes out of that more prayerful place.

Al: So it's not about just deciding what the top leader decides.

Steve: No, I would hope we're doing it as a team. I really do. Team is the best way to go. It's also the hardest way to go. It's much easier to be an autocrat than it is to be a team builder, because anytime a person enters or exits the team, the whole team changes, so we have to start all over again. Team building is exhausting work, but I think it's the most exhilarating and the most biblical way to go.

Al: That's great. Steve, as we conclude our time, what would you like to say to fellow Christian leaders about what has been most meaningful and significant to you in cultivating and sustaining your own spiritual life?

Steve: My quick answer to that would be Sabbath rest. I think the turnkey to the deeper life is learning how to rest. Without rest you will not know how to trust. If you want to learn how to trust God, you need to learn how to rest in him. That is a strong biblical priority. It's one of the Ten Commandments that God himself also followed in the creation account.

He used the most words, something like 64 words, to describe the commandment to rest, and yet for some reason today...twenty-first century ministry leaders, evangelicals in particular...we feel we don't need to rest. In fact, we're almost opposed to rest. I'll have pastors say to me in retreat, "Sabbath is impossible." I'm like, "You've got to be kidding me. How can Sabbath be impossible? If Sabbath is impossible, then a life with God is not happening." God is not anti-work; God is pro-rest. We need to follow God's example and God's command.

So I would say the turnkey for me has been through spiritual direction, spiritual friendship through these teams I've been a part of, for people around me to say, "Steve, stop doing, stop talking, and start resting, and in resting learn how to trust at a deeper way." But we have cell phones. We're addicted. We all have dopamine addictions these days. We have to get off of those things and get into a place of rest. I would say learn how to rest. Please. For God's sake, for the kingdom's sake, for your church and family's sake, and for your soul's sake, please learn how to rest.

Al: It's interesting. We ask the question about work-life balance in our survey with staff, and on a podcast that's being published this week the pastor was saying they actually give a \$200 bonus if a person comes back from vacation and has not replied to an email or texted somebody about work.

Steve: That's awesome.

Al: I thought, "Wow!" You talk about rest and Sabbath rest. That's really putting your money where your mouth is.

Steve: Vitally important.

Al: Thanks again for being with us today. We certainly have enjoyed what we've learned. The challenge you started right off... You said the soul is the most undeveloped part of our existence, and you've really helped us walk through, especially as it relates to spiritual vitality and teams, how the soul is so important. As the soul goes, you say, so goes the leader. There are five elements of the team and how important it is to have a cohesive spiritually vital team and the benefits of that.

Then, again, for each of us, as we work toward our own contemplative practice, where we have spiritual friendships, where we're able to discern as a team, and then as you ended up with spiritual rest. A Sabbath rest is really important for all of us. So thanks, Steve, for sharing your wisdom, insights, and stories, and thank you for extending your ministry to the leaders who have been listening and benefiting from all you've shared today.

Steve: Thank you, Al. The name of the book is *Becoming a Healthy Team*. There's also a workbook for folks who are interested in starting to practice some of this. Thank you.

Al: To our listening audience, thank you for investing this time in your workplace culture today. This is Al Lopus, reminding you that your leadership is a gift to live out today and every day. I'll see you again soon on the Flourishing Culture Podcast.

Male: For a free transcript of today's podcast, visit blog.bcwinstitute.org. Your feedback is very important. Leave a comment on our blog post or reach out on social media (@BCWInstitute). Also please click over to iTunes and simply rate the Flourishing Culture Podcast. Your help lets us reach more people with the same content you've enjoyed today. While you're there, be sure to click "Subscribe" to get a fresh episode delivered to you each Monday morning.

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