What’s So Important About Culture?

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For three years I lived in New Orleans. Now that’s a place that has a distinct culture! Monday in the Big Easy is wash day and with it comes red beans and rice. You don’t shop there; you “make groceries.” New Orleans is a city know for it’s food, music, history, and, of course, Mardi Gras. That’s culture! And while your community may not be as flamboyant as New Orleans, it has a culture, too. So does your home. So does your church. Culture is like air. When it’s taken away or changed, you notice. Culture is what is natural and normal in your environment. It is the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, architecture, habits, behaviors, and values that color the world around you. Culture dictates the way things are.

James Davison Hunter describes culture as “made up of the accumulation of values held by the majority of people and the choices made on the basis of those values” (To Change the World, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 6). Hunter challenges Christians to change the world by stepping out courageously with the right values and the right Christian worldview. He argues that the culture-at-large will not change until change occurs in the hearts and minds of individuals. I agree with him. I believe that this change must first happen a little closer to home than the public square. Before we can change the public culture, we must change the culture in our homes, churches, and communities.

If you are from the Baptist tradition–or any other evangelical background, for that matter–you have heard proclaimed that we as a people should be about fulfilling the Great Commission: “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20, ESV). Jesus is very clear in His desire that those who are His followers (disciples) should be persuading and helping others to become His followers (disciples).

Unfortunately, many in the church are better at talking about making disciples than they are at actually making disciples! Simply put, disciple-making is not really our culture. For many, church culture is merely religious activity. This may sound controversial to you, but let me challenge you to look at your church’s calendar for the last six months. Were you busy in activity that helped to multiply disciples or were you just busy? Look at your personal calendar. Were you busy investing in others for the sake of the gospel or were you just busy?

So, for discussion: In your opinion, what does a disciple-making culture look like? What would change if you began to try to create that culture in your home? Your church? Your neighborhood? In the days to come, I will tell you how God has led me to try to do that. Leave your comments and share what God is showing you!