



Have you ever been in a NEGATIVE culture?

- * It PULLS YOU DOWN all the time: Saps you of STRENGTH, empties you of HOPE, attacks & undermines your FAITH.
 - *Have you ever been in an overtly negative culture? What did it feel like? What were its characteristics? What effect did that environment have on you?*
- * Certain DESIRABLE things just will not GROW there; the flip is that certain UNDESIRABLE things will.
 - *What desirable things just won't grow in a negative culture? What undesirable things quite possibly will instead?*
- * If you allow NEGATIVITY to creep into your culture, there will be CONSEQUENCES ... and none of them are GOOD.
 - *How does negativity creep in? How could we guard against it?*

THE BIG IDEA: Church should be DIFFERENT

- * We serve a God who CAN.
- * We have a BIBLE full of powerful PROMISES that apply directly to us.
- * Because of the finished work of the Cross, we've been declared VICTORIOUS, RIGHTEOUS, HOLY, BLESSED, FAVOURED & FREE.
 - *Is the world, in general, a negative place? Where is it particularly negative? How does that negativity affect you?*
 - *Why should church be different? Is it? What is the basis of our positivity? How does or should that positivity manifest itself?*
 - *What do you need from a Sunday morning service? How does a positive culture feed into that? How would a negative culture detract from it?*

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF A POSITIVE CULTURE

1. HOPEFULNESS (Ephesians 1:18, Romans 15:13, 1 Peter 1:3-4)
 - ... CALLED to OVERFLOW with a LIVING HOPE.
 - * We have a hope that God will COME THROUGH FOR US.
 - * We have a hope that His GRACE is SUFFICIENT.
 - * We have a hope that He will SUPPLY all our NEEDS.
 - * We have a hope that in ALL THINGS we're more than CONQUERORS.
 - * We have a hope that God is WORKING all things together for GOOD.
 - * We have a hope that He has a PLAN for us.
 - * We have a hope that there's an INHERITANCE laid aside for us.

People should be BOWLED OVER by our hopefulness.

That hope is really ATTRACTIVE & COMPELLING.

- *Is hope one of our points of difference? Are people out there short of hope? Why is hope both attractive and compelling? Does hope, therefore, become for us a great opportunity?*

2. EXPECTATION (Ephesians 3:20-21)

- * What's your expectation of CHURCH? What's your expectation of what YOU can do or what WE can do? However you answer those questions, you're thinking WAY TOO SMALL.
 - *Do you think too small? What could God do? How could He use you/us? Have we / you lost our / your expectation? Why is that? Where should our expectation levels be?*
- * Expectation is CRITICAL, because without it, you'll tend to settle for MEDIOCRE and our God is NOT MEDIOCRE.
 - I can be confident & expectant because:
 - * I know IN WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED.
 - * I know WHAT JESUS HAS DONE.
 - * I have a Bible stacked full of PROMISES for me and my family.
 - *How do you balance apparent reality with godly hope & dream? Which should be the stronger influence over you, your feelings or God's Word? Do your circumstances drive your expectations or does your expectation drive your circumstances?*

There's a difference between expectation and WISHFUL THINKING

Our CONFIDENT EXPECTATION is:

- * Not based on UNKNOWNS, but on KNOWNS.
- * Not on WHIMS, CIRCUMSTANCES, FEELINGS, but His WORD.
- * Not on UNFOUNDED OPTIMISM, but strong RESURRECTION REALITY.

3. ENCOURAGEMENT (Hebrews 10:23-24)

- *Do you respond better to encouragement or discouragement? Why? How much encouragement does it take to counter one significant piece of discouragement?*

QUICK FACTS:

- i) Encouragement fills you with STRENGTH; discouragement DRAINS IT.
- ii) Encouragement can CHANGE the ATMOSPHERE around you.
 - *If you are unwittingly creating a negative atmosphere around you, how can you change that? If others around you are creating a negative atmosphere, how might you shift that?*
- iii) Encouragement will OPEN DOORS for you.
 - *Is this true? Has it worked for you? How might you leverage that in your life and circumstances, your home and workplace right now?*
- iv) Encouragement is a great OPPORTUNITY.

HOW DO WE GROW & PROTECT THAT CULTURE

THREE WORDS OF ADVICE

1. PRACTISE POSITIVITY

- *How do you do that? What habits could you introduce to your life? How do you make new habits stick? Are there any habits you need to break?*

2. Don't LOSE SIGHT of the BIGGER picture by getting sucked into DETAILS.

- *"The enemy operates through exaggeration, distortion and lies." Discuss! Why is it so important (and often difficult) to keep the bigger picture in view?*

3. Keep a GUARD on your MIND (Philippians 4:8)

- *"We all know the battleground is our own thoughts. We know the theory, but it's so much harder in practice." Discuss!*

- *Do you fall into the trap of 'filtering out the positive' or unhealthily 'magnifying the negative?' Why are they dangerous and how might you change the way you think?*

- *What exactly does Paul encourage us to fix our thoughts on in Phil 4:8?*