

Today Counts Show Episode 77

Hey listeners, especially those of you who live in the San Antonio area, you gotta save the date! Mark the date: September 7th, 2023. A leadership conference with the theme "God and Country," special speaker General Jerry Boykin. September 7th, 2023. Visit leadtodaycommunity.com/events to get your tickets today.

Welcome to the "Today Counts" show. Today does count because it impacts and influences your tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. The "Today Counts" podcast is sponsored by the generous donors of the Lead Today Community. I'm your host, Jim Piper.

Everyone, welcome back to the "Today Counts" show. We are in part five of six, with the title "Timeless Wisdom for Diligent Leaders." You know, culture is a big word today. Even in business, it's a big word. Organizations have become aware that it's important to develop the right kind of culture, that's healthy, that's productive. Churches, just about every organization is catching this wave, and it kind of reminds me of the phrase that was attributed to- recognized from Peter Drucker, who said that culture eats strategy. He said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast every day." And what he was saying is that culture is the muscle, it is the community that actually gets things done. When all is said and done, culture is what gets things done.

The way that I look at culture is I kind of see it as a body of water, and then what contributes to that body of water are several fingers or lakes or streams that feed that body of water and therefore create culture. It can be values, it can be processes, it can be history, it can be the product, it can be obviously the people there. All those kinds of things have to do with creating culture.

Three Culture-Building Values: Honor, Care, and Protection

And as you know, I'm kind of walking through this New Testament book called First Timothy in Scripture, and in the fifth chapter of First Timothy, I've even given it a title. The title that I'm giving it is "Three Culture-Building Values." So if you're a leader and you're trying to figure out how to build a certain kind of culture in your family, or maybe it's a non-profit organization, or it's your business, maybe it's your team, it's your organization, it's your church, whatever it is, I know this is like a big buzzword, and so I'm not simply jumping on that train. I've been on that train for a long, long time. And as a leader, when I look back at my record, you know, there are times where you're ignorant of terminology, but you're doing all the right things that create the kind of culture that you're looking for. And sometimes when you become aware of terminology, that has no bearing on the fact of whether you're helping to create good and positive culture or not. So when I look back at my life, man, there's all kinds of things I could have done a lot better,

and you know what, some of the things I'm going to talk to you about right now is a good example of what I'm talking about.

Honor

So I'm going to call this "Three Culture-Building Values." Whether Paul, the Apostle Paul, would have coined it that way or not, I don't know, I don't think so, I doubt it, but the three words we're going to be looking at is honor, care, and protection. Those are the three things that I believe that he is speaking of. So first, let's look at this idea of honor. I'm going to read right from the text. It says, "Never speak harshly to an older man, never speak harshly, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father. Talk to younger men as you would to your own brothers. Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters." That's found in the New Testament book of the Bible, First Timothy 5:1-2.

Now, whether you're a churchgoer or not, whether you're somebody who believes in God or not, I think you'll find great value in this if you stick with it and just kind of walk through these ideas with me. The teachings of the church aim to do something, they aim to change something, they aim to add value. The teachings of the church aim to create a model society, if you will, and a subculture that often differentiates itself from the common attitudes and the behaviors that you and I often experience in the world. And we don't always experience bad things in the world, but we often do, don't we?

So, the context of this letter, of course, is to a church, a local church, a church in Ephesus, and Paul is injecting these ideas into this culture. So, a local body of believers, they're called to something, they're called in many ways to be counter-cultural to what we often find out on the streets and in some neighborhoods, etc. Now, this is not to suggest that the church is perfect. The church is not perfect by any means because it envelops people, it envelops believers and unbelievers, seekers who are still in the process of being transformed into the image of Christ. From a biblical worldview, God woos people to Himself. Woos them back home, I like to say, because it was never our idea to be born anyway. So once we are born, God starts speaking to us through the stars in the sky, through love, through trouble, through all the things that we are in awe of and amazed at. And as He woos us to Himself, He gathers us in another creation, called the church. And the church is the transforming agent in the world today. So that's really the context here, what's going on.

The Impact of Honor on Creating a Positive Culture

So in the scripture that I read earlier, that I referenced earlier, we are instructed to live a new way of living, if you will, the right way of living, the spiritual way of living, the wise way of living, the diligent way for leaders to live is to honor people, to honor one another, to be courteous, to be respectful to our fellow man. I resonate with this, I don't push back on this at all. I don't even have, you know, those voices that some of us might be having right now, "What about the jerk next door? And what about Uncle Lou, oh my gosh, the guy's a crazy maniac." You know what, those thoughts honestly don't even cross my mind. I know that I probably should address them,

but they don't cross my mind because I resonate with this teaching. It not only sounds right to me and feels right, it has been modeled for me since birth. I saw it on display in my home and I saw it on display in the church, not a hundred percent of the time, not always, not flawlessly, but in the majority, and it had an impact on me.

So, you know, like when you walk into a room of peace, you can tell when you walk into a room of anxiety and conflict, you can tell. I'm not saying that healthy environments don't have anxiety and don't have conflict, but in general, you kind of get the idea of one that is moving in the right direction and one that is not. So this exhortation, this value of honor and honoring one another, when we teach it, when we live it, when we reinforce it, it will begin shaping a culture of honor in your marriage, in your family, in your workplace, in your church, in your community.

Now the exhortation does not suggest that you will, now to the issue, never encounter a difference of opinion with someone. It doesn't suggest that you cannot or that you should not hold others accountable for bad behavior or poor performance. That's not what this is saying, but it certainly does say, it certainly does at least imply that we must recognize the intrinsic value of every human being in times of harmony and in points of disagreement and needed correction. In other words, as diligent wise leaders, we have to separate the intrinsic value of a person from sometime their poor behavior or differences of opinion. That is honoring them even while we're working through what otherwise might be a difficult situation.

Now I find it interesting that the Apostle Paul, the author of this letter to Pastor Timothy in Ephesus, in this local church, I find it interesting that the author, Apostle Paul, would find it necessary to even teach this particular virtue to the church. You would think it would have gone without saying, you would think it would be common sense, but apparently it's not. You would think that we could walk out our doors and walk into society and expect to experience a kind and gentle world, but we all know that that's not the case.

In my younger years, as a young man in my late 20s, early 30s, I did a short stint as a police chaplain in one city east of Los Angeles, and during that time, I was exposed to a less friendly side of life, that's one way to say it. Certain neighborhoods operated more like spider webs than communities, and if you ended up in that neighborhood, you were caught, you were literally caught in a spider web. I'm not exaggerating. If you entered those kind of communities, those neighborhoods-- It's kind of hard to call it a community. I'll still with neighborhood. If you entered at the wrong time, it could even cost you your life, no exaggeration. The whole scene. I mean, the whole scene. You think of it, and it was there; rape, murder, battery, theft, drugs, and frankly, just nonsense spilled out in the form of extreme lust and hate. No clear reason, just a lot of violence.

So when we read these first two verses, again, I'm gonna read them again, but I'm gonna read them a little slower and let's see if we can hear the tenderness and the power in the words that Paul is writing to create culture because this is the spirit of the Christian and this is the spirit of the Christian leader. "Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would in your own father. Talk to younger men as you would to your own brothers. Treat

older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters." The first value, honor.

Care

The second one, care. I find this one interesting as well. Paul writes, "Take care of any widow who has no one else to care for her. But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God." In other words, it's kind of how God designed it. He goes on, "But those who won't care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. They're not people of faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers."

Family as the Core of Society

Ouch. That is a huge statement, and it does sound wrong, it does feel wrong, doesn't it, that we wouldn't care for our own family in times of need? Let's talk about family for a minute. Family, like the human being, is a creation of God. Family is the core of society. The church is a subset of society, it's a creation also of God. Organizations are a subset of society, governments are a subset of society. Of all these examples, the family is designed by God to care for one another from the cradle to the grave. Family is thick, right? You've heard the term "blood is thicker than water." As it should be, family is thick. Most matriarchs and patriarchs say to their family, "Family first."

One of the things that I have shared and continue to share with my family is that we reach out to friends, we reach out to others, but we hold on to and embrace family. For those who lose a loved one, a husband, a wife, a parent, but they have family, those people become the responsibility of the family, not society and not the church. People who end up alone in life, completely alone with no family, they are to be adopted, if you will, embraced and cared for. If they don't have the extended family, then by the church. That is what Paul is saying here. So whether widowed or widower or orphan, the church is to care for these people. That's because the church is, again, the agent of God and His caring and the church does have the means and the connections. Whether it's with parachurch organizations or government agencies or neighborhood groups or people within the church itself, the church has the means and connections to assist and care for these people.

So, you know what Paul is doing is he's just not- when he talks about care, he's bringing it down to a very practical way, a very practical set of structure for caring. Caring isn't just a feeling, it is an important part of what Paul is trying to establish in the church.

Protection

We've talked about two values. First is honor, and the second is care. I think they're pretty powerful. They keep us from living a selfish life, a life of condemnation, a narcissistic life, an isolated life. These are very communal ideas. And he gives us one more idea, and I called it

protection. I told you that on the front end, protection. But this is probably not what you're thinking. In this case, he's specifically talking about protecting leadership.

Let me read you the text. "Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, 'You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.'" In other words, you don't starve the beast that is laboring to provide you food. "For the scripture says, 'You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.' Or to put it in street terms, and another place, "Those who work deserve their pay."

He goes on a little bit further down in the chapter, "Do not listen to an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses." I think that means if one of your two witnesses is a little sketchy, you might want to get another witness. "Those who sin should be reprimanded," those leaders whose sin should be reprimanded in front of everybody. There's a high calling to leadership, there's a high standard, "and this will serve as a strong warning to others." And then finally, he says towards the end of the chapter, "Never be in a hurry about appointing a church leader."

Diligent leaders are not in it for the money

Alright, let's talk about this for a little bit. I have a lot to say on this idea. So we're looking at three values, we're looking at honor, care, and now protection. You see, diligent leaders, that's what we're talking about, wise and diligent leaders. They work consistently hard. They're hard workers, that's what diligent means. They're in it, they're working on it, they're working in it, they're working on it, they're working in it. Diligent leaders are learners, they're encouragers, they correct and they empower, and other things, but those, to me, kind of symbolize the hard work of leadership. They are not in it for the money. They are not in it for the money.

From a Christian worldview, leadership is servanthood. Even if I'm the CEO of ABC Corporation, if I'm a believer, my mindset is to serve the mission of the organization, to serve the customers, to serve the people that help serve the customers. It is a place of service. And they're not in it for the money. Now, you and I both know that CEOs of some of our largest organizations in our nation are some of the wealthiest people in our nation. I think that's very possible. I think that's very possible. That's the way economics work. But if they're in it for the money, then these are not the leaders that Paul is addressing. In Paul's definition of diligence, he's talking about a work, a labor of love. He's talking about something that has a clear and pure heart. So if somebody is in it for the money, they're they're not the diligent leaders being referenced here, so let's let's make that clear.

Now, something I have noticed about diligent leaders, whether they make fifty thousand a year or five hundred thousand a year, is that leaders learn to be very selective about which churches and organizations and clients they are willing to work for to serve and to lead. They become very selective. Here's why. Because diligent leaders learn through bumps and bruises to go where good leadership, diligent leadership, is appreciated. Not because it's easier, they're not looking for a soft place to land, but because they know that leadership is a team sport and

everybody has a role to play, and the leader's role has to be very clear. And that's an important part of their selection process because if everything depends upon the leader, in other words, if the leader is the clown in the arena, the performer in the arena, and everyone is there evaluating the leader and that's the extent of their contribution, then failure is in the wings. That's what's going to happen.

Cooperation is the oil that keeps the organization running smoothly. Organizations that do not appreciate diligent leadership tend to supervise the leaders, micromanage the leaders, they criticize them at almost every turn as if they could do better. That's just kind of what they do, right? It's just what they do. It's what the crowd does. And they also suspect them of poor motives and behaviors. It's kind of a dark spirit, really. It's a human rebellion, and I don't know if it's rooted in jealousy, insecurity, covetousness. I'm not sure what that spirit is rooted in, but I see it everywhere. I see it in non-profits, I see it in churches, I see it in private companies, and I see it in public companies. I see it a lot of places. And we really want to expel that dark spirit out of our organizations and certainly our churches.

And so, I don't blame pastors and leaders who say, "Eh, you know--" I mean, I can tell you a story real quick, and see if you can feel my pain. This was in the year 2009, I think it was, and there was an organization in Las Vegas, Nevada, and they were courting me and I was courting them, and I kind of had a go-between, a mentor I had, a broker, if you will, not formally but informally, and what was kind of bringing us together. And it was really moving along, and it looked like we were right on the front porch, the front step of doing a deal, and me and my wife would have had to move, and it was going to be exciting and challenging at the same time. I'm one of those leaders that loves a new challenge. And late at night, the day before we were supposed to have the talk, if you know what I mean, I got a call from this mentor, this friend, and he told me to run. He said, "Don't go, cancel the meeting, don't go. Here's what I found out." And what he found out was that there were some toxic people in the shadows that were really just looking for another puppet to get their way. And I was very appreciative of that, and I did, I ran like heck. Because a leader comes in to serve. Yes, you've heard of leaders that come into clear house and to change things, and that's fine if that is what's being understood in going in. Not that that's easy either because sometimes that takes patience as well.

Protecting leaders also protects the organization

Alright, so the idea is that when you protect diligent leaders, you also protect the organization, and it starts by paying them well. Yeah, you heard it right, pay your leaders well. Leadership is a war, it's an absolute war. A lot of people they think they aspire to leadership and they get there, they go, "What? What the heck is this?" Because it's an invisible force, it's extremely taxing, and your tenacity and your character is tested at every single turn. Leadership is a war, and it's difficult to fight two wars at the same time; leading the organization and providing for your family at the same time. Those are two completely different wars. So if you want a leader that's focused, if you want a leader that can fight a war, you've got to make sure that you pay them well. When you pay them well, it removes the temptation for them to seek a side hustle, a second job, a third job, to be in two places at the same time, to be tempted to go and do something that better provides for their family. Seems like common sense to me, but apparently

it's not. Apparently, it's not. It's almost like, you know, what little can we pay our leaders is the mindset in many places. What little can we pay? Man, that is just the wrong mindset, and I think it's amazing this is coming out of biblical scripture.

All right, protecting diligent leaders also means to protect them from false accusations. Now, you can do that in a lot of different ways. In general, you want to distance them from anything where someone can falsely accuse them. You need to help separate them so that they can be beyond reproach. Let me give you just some examples. Give them authority to direct funds, money, and to do certain things with funds, but put a process around that versus giving them direct access to the money. Make sure that the process gives them plenty of authority to be effective in their role, but also protect them from false accusations. That's not a difficult thing to do.

Another is to covenant with the leader to work together, with the leader to create a policy mutually agreed upon in a variety of other areas of exposure, like meeting alone with a person of the opposite sex, particularly in the world of ministry. Very important to do that. Make sure that they have enough time of rest, force them to have times of rest, make sure you have enough vacation time. When you put these kinds of policies in place, and you know what, I just got to say this, obviously, wise leaders want to see what best practices are but recognize that best practices are not always best practices. You have to kind of evaluate just because somebody labels some organization labels or some consultant labels a certain process or a certain policy or a certain way as best practices, you still need to keep your own counsel on that and make sure that that fits your context. I think leaders need rest.

One of the things that I struggle with is, as an entrepreneur, I don't have that kind of accountability except for my wife and and my wife is strong at that and if she wasn't, I think I would work myself to death. I can be a workaholic. No one has to hold me account-- Rarely do you have to hold a diligent leader accountable to working. If anything, you need to hold them accountable to resting, taking vacation time, being with their family. They get this backwards. We have so many lay leaders in the corporate world. I mean, they get a paycheck and and in the church and they're just clueless because I don't think they run with stallions. I don't think they fly with eagles. I know this sounds really harsh but man, the leaders I hang out with, it's, "Hey, can can you take an hour out for yourself? Can we get together? Can we fit in the golf match?" Maybe your experience is different but the leaders I hang with we have to work hard to find time to play a round of golf. That's just the way it is.

Anyway, when you put these kinds of policies in place, and those are just some examples I give you, then you are able to ignore the accusation of some squeaky wheel that one person, sometimes even two people who've collaborated together to take somebody down to settle the score whatever the reason. Whoever you are that has the opportunity to protect leaders, do your job and protect the leaders. It's not like you give them free reign, give them authority, but with processes and boundaries and accountability that protects them. I could go on and on about this.

If I've made mistakes in the nonprofit world, I've given lay people too much power. So many of them have never been in the first chair, they don't have a clue. But somehow, we delegate

authority to them, too much authority, I should say. Now, we can raise them up and see them grow, and that would be great. So what we want to do is we want to create a culture of protection so that we can require two or three witnesses before investigating a matter. We can literally tell somebody, "Take a hike. If you don't have a few witnesses, forget it. We've got this person's back."

Hiring for leaders should be an exhaustive process

Finally, Paul brings in the hiring thing. He says that we should not be in a hurry to hire. Hiring for leadership positions should be an exhaustive and an exhausting process. It should require time, research, and multiple layers of decision-makers having some say, having some input. I would use assessments. I would literally check out references, and if you could even check out some references that maybe don't think that person is the best thing since sliced bread and just see if their opinion really has much weight. And I think this excruciating pain is important for those outside of the organization trying to come in.

Now, if you're hiring from inside the organization, your culture should always be constantly interviewing, constantly evaluating, and then, you know, moving people up who are skilled and desire to move up to a higher level. In most of my coaching, I work with people who have been promoted, but they don't have a lot of experience yet, they haven't got their sea legs yet for that higher role. So I often use the term, you know, leading at an elevated position. That sounds snobby, but it's actually not. It's learning how to lead through others, not over them, under them, or around them.

That's a lot, folks. That's a lot. It all comes out of that scripture, that fifth chapter. If you're not a believer, if you haven't been to church, you don't read your Bible, you might be surprised at not only things that you'll learn about God but how God's design can impact your family and your organization. Honor, care, protection. Wow, those are three strong values that can create a healthy culture.

If you're not part of the Lead Today Community, let me invite you, go to leadtodaycommunity.com. That's leadtodaycommunity.com, and sign up for Monday Moments. It's a weekly email that will encourage your leadership. Again, thank you for joining us today, and thank you for telling a friend about the Today Counts Show.