

Creating a Culture

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[0:00] Well, good morning, good morning. It is a joy to be here with you. Now, I only have a few minutes with the kids before they get sent off to do something better.

And trust me, it will be better because I'm just going to talk to the adults and I'm going to be boring. Like, boring. So I've got a couple minutes, but I'm going to ask you a very difficult question in just a couple seconds.

How old you are, okay? So think about it, be ready. I'm going to ask you how old you are. So I'm from Gull Lake Baptist Camp, Gull Lake Center, Gull Lake Camp, Gull Lake Camp and Retreat Center, and we are your camp.

And we've been around for 102 years, which is just amazing. And we have had decades and decades of campers come from this church and it's just been a blessing. Okay, how old are you two?

Nine, eight. Too shy to say. That's okay. That's allowed.

[1:01] So I have four kids. They're 15, 13, 11, and eight. And they've all been able to come up and go to camp as well. And it's been delightful. It's their favorite thing. My oldest daughter is actually still in LTD, still called LTD.

We've changed a lot of things about the camp, but hopefully the heart is still the same. And LTD is still called LTD, which stands for Leadership Training and Discipleship. And it's been around for about 40 years, which is just cool.

And I actually came from our spring LTD retreat this weekend to be here with you. And we got to have a grad ceremony for the high school kids last night, which was very cool.

But we also have camps for ages as young as five. So we have this one cool camp. It's just a weekend. It's called Scamper Camp. But there's a cool thing that happens at Scamper Camp.

You can either come by yourself, or if you've never been to camp before, you're a little bit shy about, you want to bring some help, you can come with a parent, or a grandparent, or an aunt, and an uncle.

[1:57] And the parents, the adults, have no leadership responsibilities whatsoever. They are campers just like the kids, which means that we put a cabin leader in the cabin with the parents, or grandparents, and kids.

So it's three adults, it's three kids, and some like 19-year-old cabin leader who's there to tell them, no, no, it's nine o'clock, it's lights out. No, no, you do have to brush your teeth, mom.

Like that's the deal. So my youngest, I got to go with him because we had just started this a couple years ago when he was in that age. And it was one of my favorite camp experiences because I got to do camp with him.

And we had a weekend that was just bonding for the two of us. And one of my favorite memories of it was we're playing a Y game, which I think was probably like Pony Express. We have to deliver mail all over the camp.

Classic game. And there's a bandit, a masked bandit, and he's the villain. And we got to stay away from the masked bandit or else we have to start over. Terrible consequences. So we're running around, we're hiding behind a building, we've got our cabin.

[3 : 00] And we're kind of trying to sneak around the corner, but we can't quite do it. It's my son who's five. I pick him up, turn him sideways, shove his head out around the corner. He just looks like this, clear. Pull him back, sit him down, and away we go.

And that was a memory that we got to have, just the two of us, that was an absolute blast, and we loved it. This summer, we're so grateful to be back. It's been a weird couple of years, and we're back, and we've got all cylinders firing.

We're going to have boating and climbing wall, and we've got this cool thing called bumper balls, which are these five-foot, basically inflatable donuts that have a harness, and you go inside, and you just run, you smuck into each other, and it's just a blast.

And we have, of course, times of worship and connection and prayer and meditation and solitude and just good connection where we gather with the word of the Lord and sit in silence and reverence and wait for him to speak to us, which is what happened to me when I was 15, and that's when I decided that this was the purpose of my life, to follow Jesus, and it happened at Gull Lake Camp, and I am forever grateful and forever blessed since then.

All right, that's the exciting part. Children, it's going to get boring. I will save you from that. You may go as you wish. There's camp videos in the hall.

[4 : 20] Adults, so if you want to go with them, be like, I think I got to volunteer for like Children's Church today. I will be offended, but I will get over it. Barely.

So it is a real joy to be here with you this morning because it wasn't obvious two years ago that the camp would still be around.

Two years ago, I gave layoff notices to the entire staff, including myself, because it was very obvious that we were going to run out of money because like the Sunday that COVID hit or kind of everything shut down, NHL shut down, NBA shut down.

The Monday after, we had over \$200,000 in our rentals cancel in a single day. We subsidized camp heavily.

So a camper pays about \$350 for a week of camp. It costs us an additional \$350 on top of that to actually provide their week of camp. And a lot of that revenue comes from our rentals as well as donors from churches and individuals such as yourself.

[5 : 27] So we were very worried that we were going to run out of money. So we cut expenses as much as we possibly could. And then donations started pouring in. And we received help from the government with the wage subsidy.

We were able to hire the staff back. We were able to keep six staff through the pandemic. And through those two years, we just kept planning and replanning and canceling plans and adjusting.

And we ran virtual camp. We ran camp over Zoom. It was terrible. Terrible. Not bad for a Zoom camp, but like nothing compared to real camp.

Then we ran day camp. It was mediocre. Again, pretty good for a day camp, but terrible compared to the overnight immersive experience that we normally get to have. And then last summer, we were given five weeks notice that we'd be able to run camp.

And we were ready. We were ready because we were able to keep those staff on. And we had just made plan after plan after plan after plan, contingency after contingency. So whatever we were allowed to do, whenever we were allowed to do it, we did it.

[6 : 28] And last summer, we got to run camp for 800 kids. And we could not have done that without you. And of those 800 kids, 93 of them made first-time decisions to follow Christ.

And we are so grateful. And that is partly because of you. Our ministry at camp is simply an extension of your ministry here. We could not have done it without you. We could not have survived these two years without you.

And we could not have housed, you know, those 800 kids last summer. So thank you. It really means a lot to me. And it's a joy to be here with you this morning to come and share part of our collective story together with what gets to happen at Gull Lake.

But wait. There is more. Not only did we get to run camp last summer, but we also finished our 100th anniversary kind of celebration project.

So 2020 was our 100th anniversary. We're finally going to celebrate our 102nd anniversary in June. But we got to build some new cabins.

[7 : 31] We built a playground. We paid off kind of the mortgage from the previous campaign where we built the main lodge. All our cabins now. So it's like, yeah, when your kids were there, camp looked a little bit different.

But we still have the same purpose. We still have the hearts. But now we have bathrooms in the cabins. It's very exciting. And we have a new septic system.

Also very exciting. But wait. There's more. So this campaign, which includes new cabins, cost \$2.7 million.

So far we've raised \$2.4 million. Meaning that we only have \$300,000 still to go. But wait. There's more. There's a matching donor who's put up \$150,000 to match every dollar that comes in so that we can cross the finish line.

So we only need \$150,000 new money to completely pay this off, be completely debt-free going into this year, which would be huge. So yeah.

[8 : 34] If that's something that's on your heart, if that's something that's interested in you, you can talk to me afterwards or find us online. This church has been a significant supporter and contributor for the camp for decades.

And we wouldn't be here without you. So thank you very much. On June 11th, which is coming up pretty soon, we are going to celebrate our 100th and 2nd anniversary. And it's going to be delightful.

We're going to have food. We're going to have tons of old pictures. This is our third try at it. And good golly, it's happening. By hook or by crook, it is happening. Or I quit.

I don't know. But it's going to be a great time. Lots of old camp friends. Really cool pictures. We have all. So I'm going through the archives, we have these amazing glass slides from like 1921, which show like a lot of the original buildings.

And it's really cool. So like, you can't really see if you know the camp. So there's this road here. There's these giant spruce trees on it. They're not there in that picture because they were planted by the founder, Dr. McLaurin, somewhere around 90 years ago.

[9 : 43] And you get to come and see and you get to see the old pictures where it's just a field and now you look and it's just this forest and these trees and all these cool buildings. So there's going to be lots of cool stuff and it's going to be delightful. So you are welcome and invited and I would love to see you there.

So, a couple things. If you have kids, if you have grandkids, if you have neighbors, if you have some kid that you have seen once and you're like, that kid should go to camp, please send them to camp. As Pastor Kent said, your church has been able to provide camperships but the camp also has a campership fund.

We never, ever, ever, ever, ever want money to be the reason a kid doesn't come to camp. We think that's a terrible reason. So we will find a way for them to come to camp. If you are one of those people that maybe doesn't have a kid that you can send to camp but you're willing to help donate so that some other kid can come to camp, that's very helpful as well.

Quick secret to you, that's how we find a way for those other kids to come to camp is by donors. So it's like, I can't just say, we'll find a way. You might be the way. And the third thing is, on June 11th, we're going to have the 100th celebration and you're invited and welcome to come to that.

Okay. Enough about me. Just kidding. I'm going to talk about me this whole time. But specifically, I want to talk about leadership this morning.

[10:59] I want to talk about cultivating a culture because this is something that we really stress and obsess over at camp. And it's something I see God doing throughout the Bible and then Jesus doing very specifically in the Gospels.

So we have our leadership program, the LTD program. We have our summer staff program and that's actually what we do best. Our campers get to come, they come for a week, but our leaders come if you're in LTD for three to six weeks, our summer staff are there for 10 to 14 weeks.

I have been there for 15 years and I have gotten the most out of the camp than anybody. I am the most spoiled by the camp and I'm deeply grateful for it. But leadership is something that we see.

So we think the camp has kind of two purposes. Evangelism, which we see evangelism as being both like first time hearing the Gospel, but also discipleship where they hear the Gospel fresh and anew and they go deeper in their faith.

So camp we think has the purpose of being that mountaintop experience where a kid comes to church kind of throughout the year and they get the solid foundational relationship and teaching that they need.

[12:10] And then they go to camp and it's like, whoa! They see God in this new light and it's like this firework goes off in there. They kind of have this rekindling and this inspiration to go and learn more.

Then they come back to church and they go deeper in their faith. They go deeper in their relationship. They go deeper in their understanding of the Bible and we see that as part of camp. And then the other thing at camp is we take a bunch of young, energetic, it's probably wrong, no, I won't say anything too negative about them.

They're young and they're energetic and we take them and they're 15 to 25 years old and we throw them in the deep end of leadership. But we do it with them.

So we go side by side and they get a mentor and a pair and when they're at camp they're always paired with somebody as well. And we just let them, no, we don't just let them figure it out.

We give them really specific teaching and then we let them practice and we let them figure out their style and how their leadership works. So leadership culture and creating culture and curating culture is really important with what we do.

[13:14] Everything at camp is kind of looked through that lens of does this add to the culture? And our culture is all about creating space for campers to connect with Christ.

So does this add to that culture? Does it not add to that culture? Anything that doesn't add to that culture we prune. So for example, cell phones, not allowed at camp.

No cell phones at camp which is a crazy, beautiful, rare thing that we kind of backed into by accident and now we love. So my daughter as I mentioned is 15.

She's an LTD. Two years of a pandemic she spent like 27 hours a day. Like it was impossible how many hours a day she spent on Zoom, on her phone, on the computer, on whatever.

Because that was school, that was entertainment, that was how she connected with her friends. Everything was over a screen. She was at camp for five weeks last summer. No screens.

[14 : 17] No phone. Could only actually interact with the people in front of her. And it was beautiful. And in that, so like at camp we often talk about how God feels thicker at camp.

That's a lie. God is not, he's not thicker at camp. He's not thicker or thinner anywhere. But we try and turn down the noise so we can hear God clearer. And that's what we do with our culture creation.

We're trying to turn down the noise and focus our energy, focus our hearts, focus our minds on who Jesus is. And that's what we do with our culture here. So I want to talk about culture creation and I want to use a story about Jesus as an example of this.

So leaders set the culture and I want to be a bit careful here because I don't want to minimize Jesus by simply calling him a leader. This talks about who Jesus is and what the kingdom of God is like.

And he certainly was and is a leader but I don't want to make him one dimensional. He's so much more than that. So I want to look at a story from the Bible that's this incredible example of culture creation.

[15 : 18] I'm going to read it to you now. It's from John chapter 13 and I invite you to imagine that you're there. That you're in the room. But you're just a fly on the wall.

You're not interacting with the scene. You're just there. You're just a fly on the wall. Can you notice how the people are spread out? What is the room like? How big is it?

What's it smell like? What's the mood in the room? What's the lighting? Imagine you're flying the wall. This is John chapter 13. It's about Jesus washing his disciples' feet.

It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

[16 : 22] So he got up from the meal, took off his other clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a base and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me.

Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. Jesus answered, those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet. Their whole body is clean, and you are clean, though not every one of you.

For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you?

[17 : 25] He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. This is an amazing story. I think we get desensitized to the popular Bible stories, and that's really too bad.

I remember one time picking up my daughter, the one I'm talking about, who's now 15, and at the time she was maybe three years old, and I'm picking her from Children's Church, and she came up with a coloring sheet that she'd been scribbling on for the last 20 minutes, and it's a coloring sheet of Jesus on the cross.

And I thought, oh no, you just took the power out of that story for her. Because now, when she's 15, or when she was 12, or 13, and she hears the story of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, it will be trite.

[18 : 37] Right? She'll be like, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, I know, Jesus died for my sins, I get it. No, you don't get it. Jesus dying for your sins is a radical thought. A radical thought.

So we have this story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, and it's not quite as radical as Jesus dying for our sins, but it's this powerful story. This is a powerful teaching moment, and it's a powerful cultural creation moment.

So, a couple things first. One, please know that in this story, washing people's feet wasn't special. This isn't an unusual act.

This is a normal part of the day. Right? It's 2,000 years ago, there's no cars, people have to walk everywhere, there's no concrete, so it's dirty, it's sandy, and they're in bare feet or sandals, right?

It's actually a lot like camp where everybody has just filthy feet all the time. So, washing your guests' feet was a very normal part of hospitality. But, here is where the powerful part comes in.

[19 : 36] It was the servant's job to wash the feet, right? There's no honor in this, there's no respect or dignity, whoever has the lowest ranking, wash the feet, because feet are gross, right?

I mean, feet today are gross, my feet are gross. Like, my kids make fun of my feet all the time, because I always have like a black toenail or missing toenail from hiking or skiing or floor hockey or whatever. Like, my feet are gross.

2,000 years ago, no sanitation, no antivirals, no antifungals, like, no waste disposal. Gross. Gross, gross.

I actually have some pictures of some really gross feet so you can really picture in your mind. No, I'm just kidding, I wouldn't do that to you. washing feet was for the servant and not your favorite servant, the other servant, the one you didn't like.

So, imagine this scene, right? All the disciples and Jesus arrive at the place where they're having supper and this is just a borrowed guest room, right? This isn't Jesus' house, it's somebody else's house and there's no one there to wash their feet.

[20 : 47] So, they sit down and the meal proceedings start to begin. I wonder, and I'm just wondering, I wonder if anyone said anything out loud.

Like, did one of the disciples go, ah, I guess we forgot to bring a servant to wash our feet or, ah, I guess we don't get a wash tonight or did they say nothing?

Did they just, did it happen sometimes? I don't know. I don't know. I don't fully know what the cultural rules and norms were right then. I don't know what happened exactly.

But I do know what should have happened. One of the disciples should have washed their master's feet. Jesus was their rabbi.

He was their master. In this relationship, they are the servants. But nobody, gets up to do it. And I don't think that any of them would have had a problem washing Jesus' feet.

[21 : 46] He was obviously above them. I actually think they probably would have been honored to wash Jesus' feet. But I wonder, and again, I'm just wondering, if they didn't want to wash the other disciples' feet.

I wonder if they thought they were above that. I wonder if they didn't want to take the role of servant amongst the group. Right? Because once you do something once, that becomes your role forever.

So I wonder if there's this awkward moment. Right? They're all sitting there around the table where everyone's kind of just looking around wondering who's going to do the feet?

Who's going to wash the feet? Right? Who's going to stand up first and take the role of servant? Or I wonder if they'll just resign themselves to the fact that no one's going to wash their feet that night.

It's no big deal. It's disappointing, but it's not the end of the world. But either way, we do know that none of the disciples get up to do it.

[22 : 46] And then, Jesus, the teacher, the rabbi, the guest of honor, the master, not to mention the Son of God, God himself, the Savior of the world, the Messiah, gets up, takes off his robe, puts on an apron, and begins washing their feet, taking on the role of the servant.

That is incredible humility. What an incredible moment that has shaped our Western world in deep ways. This is the beginning of servant leadership, which was very popular in the 90s.

The ripples of this moment are global. Jesus, by humbling himself to the role of the servant, is making a very loud statement to his disciples.

He is saying, you are not special. You are unique. You have gifts that have been given to you that make you different. You matter.

You absolutely matter. But you are not special. You are not above anyone else. You do not get special treatment. Your job is to serve, just like my job is to serve.

[24 : 04] Jesus is saying, you are not equal to me. I'm your master and I'm serving you. Now go and follow my example and serve one another.

And that's powerful teaching. Now, I've seen this act out in ways that are totally, as the youth would say today, cringy. It's just like, ah, I don't like this.

I've seen church leaders completely miss the mark on this by bringing people up on stage so that they can make this public display of washing their feet in front of everyone so the crowd could see just how much they were like Jesus.

Right? Like, imagine if I called Pastor Kent up here and I was like, Kent, I'd like to wash your feet now. Or if like the kids that we send are like, kids, I want to wash your feet now. That would be weird, right?

That's not the same. One, I'm assuming your feet are clean, right? So it's not the same. Yeah, clean-ish, ish, close enough. Still gross, but yeah, but still. But that is a thing where I am actually adding to my power.

[25 : 12] I'm inviting someone up. I'm saying, look at me. Look at how humble I am. Aren't I amazing? Right? That's not what Jesus was doing here. Now, I have seen this done in a lovely way and a very symbol or symbolic demonstration of humility and respect, right?

I've seen at a wedding where the couple wash each other's feet as a promise to serve and honor each other, to serve each other well. I think that's beautiful and it's intimate and it's private and it's wonderful.

That's not what I'm talking about here. What I'm talking about is people in a power position trying to show off their fake humility in a way that just isn't right. And I bring this up because Jesus is teaching a critical message about the kingdom of God.

He's not talking about washing feet. That's the, you know, the physical example he's using but this is about so much more. He's talking about a means to be a follower of him.

If you are going to follow Jesus, you are going to take on the role of the servant. That is the point and that is the example he set before us. Now sadly, we see this example has not been followed countless times in the church and we are seeing it splash across the headlines with regularity today.

[26 : 28] And I don't say this to throw rocks within, you know, my glass house but to notice the temptations that I have in my life and be reminded of the example that Jesus taught us that's taught me.

I personally am tempted all the time to think that I am special because I am actually very special. I'm very important and I am better than all of you. No, just kidding. But that's the temptation, right? And I'm tempted to think that there is work that only I can do.

My role at the camp is very important. The souls of the children depend on my work and I have lots of things and I'm very busy and I'm very important so don't interrupt me. And here's the thing, part of that is actually true.

I actually do have skills and talents that are necessary at part of my job description that's necessary that I do. It would be poor stewardship if I didn't do parts of my job. But here's the thing, that does not exclude me from the role and the mindset of a servant.

Everything that I do is about service and having the heart of a servant just as it did not exclude Jesus from that role. I was listening to a podcast this past year called The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill which was this mega church based in Seattle and passed by a guy named Mark Driscoll and it's this fascinating podcast and it looks at what can happen when a Christian leader loses their servant heart.

[27 : 52] It's a difficult listen but it was an important reminder to me that we are called to serve. All of us are called to serve. In this podcast there was a snippet from a guy named Andy Crouch and he was talking about Princess Diana and Mother Teresa and some of the comparisons it can be between the two.

One being that they were two of the most famous and recognized women of the 90s and another that they both did charitable work and had significant influence and then of course that they died at the same time.

But they had utterly different paths to celebrity and influence. Andy Crouch points out that it's fascinating that almost everyone wants to be like Princess Diana but no one can be Diana.

There's only one Diana. Only one person gets to marry the Prince of Wales. Only one person that's that pretty that's that charismatic that's that well positioned and it's not you.

It's not even you Kent. It's not you. None of you are a princess. None of you are going to be a princess. You just aren't.

[29 : 05] Sorry. But you're not. You cannot do what Diana did. You cannot be her. But any of you can be like Mother Teresa.

And this is a line that Andy Crouch said that hit me especially hard. He said because all she is is a saint and any of us can be saints if we open ourselves to Jesus.

All she is is a saint and any of us can be saints if we open ourselves to Jesus. And that hits me. That hits me hard. It's the simplicity of it.

The flippancy of it. Right? Like anyone can be a saint but then also the truth of it. The path to becoming a saint is simple. It only requires us to open ourselves to Jesus.

Any of us can be a saint. Are we willing to open ourselves to Jesus? A story. Quick point.

[30 : 06] Final thought. Then I'm done. So I have a friend. Surprise. Oh, I actually I shouldn't make jokes because it's actually kind of a tough story.

So I have a friend whose brother's ex-wife so it's my friend's ex-sister-in-law is having kind of just devastating and declining physical and mental health because of their alcohol abuse.

They're relatively young and their life is just their body and mind are deteriorating awfully. It's a bad situation and this person has become incredibly difficult. She's mean.

She's confused. She's unable to take care of herself and is hospitalized and has been hospitalized for a while. But she's in denial about it and she's very upset that she's in this situation.

On top of this and partly because of all this she's getting evicted. Whether she's in denial about it or not she's still getting evicted but she isn't doing anything about it.

[31 : 07] So my friend after much verbal abuse from her ex-sister-in-law got the keys to her place moved all of her possessions into storage and then cleaned the house for her sister to cover her obligation to the landlord.

And she did this not because she had to but as an act of love and service to her ex-sister-in-law and also to the landlord who would have been stuck with it otherwise.

That's hard work. That is not pleasant work. That is not the work of a princess. That is the work of a saint. Jesus showed us how to do the work of a saint.

Jesus set the example and the expectation that we will go and be saints in the world around us. Now, this is not meant to add burden and more work to your life.

This is not another item on your to-do list like, oh great, now I need to go wash somebody's feet today as if I didn't have enough going on. That's not what this is about. This is an invitation to remind you of the culture that you are being welcomed into by Christ.

[32 : 27] A culture in which no one is better or above anyone else. A culture in which we all serve each other. A culture in which the Lord of all is willing to do the work of a servant.

Will you participate in that culture? Will you cultivate that culture? Okay, one last thought. That's it. I've got like this much of a page left. If you can, I want you to imagine that you are back in that room with the disciples and with Jesus.

The meal is about to be served but this time, instead of being a fly on the wall, imagine that you are sitting there as one of them, amongst them, in the group.

It's been a long day. You've been traveling and you are excited for this special meal. What do you think Jesus would have done when he saw you?

When he saw you sitting there with the others? I'll tell you what he would have done. He would have washed your feet. You're dirty, you're tired, you're unclean, you're unwashed.

[33 : 43] Well-used feet. He would have held them in his hands. He would have dipped them in the cleansing water. He would have rubbed them with the cloth and dried them with the towel wrapped around his waist.

It was his last supper and he would have loved you as his own to the end. So today, in the midst of whatever journey you are on, whatever has made you tired and dirty and sore.

Imagine sometime today that as you sit down to have a meal, Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of all, takes off his robe, puts on an apron, kneels beside you, and washes your feet.

What an intimate act of care for you. He does this because He loves you. He loves you to the end. Are you able to receive this love?

Now go and do the same for others.