Part 2 of 2: How to Practically Influence Culture
with Darrell L. Bock, Andy Seidel, and Andy Crouch
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Darrell Bock: So that brings us to the question then, all right, so do I just throw up my hands and walk away, or do I think about a different way of engaging? I think what you did in the book that’s interesting is that you kind of turned our attention to the possibilities of culture making in serving and engaging and thinking locally about impact as opposed to so globally. Elaborate on that.

Andy Crouch: What I definitely don’t want people to do is just throw up their hands and say, “Well, there’s nothing we can do,” because, first of all, I do believe God is transforming cultures. I think that’s what it means to say God acts in history. I mean, history is just the story of culture over time, what people have made of the world over time. We believe that God acts in history, and God involves people in his action, so we should not at all try to wash our hands of it or give up.

But I think we need to ask, “Where is God prepared to use us?” In one sense, the answer is God will use you wherever God will use you at whatever scale. God does use a few people at very large scales, but for most of us the overwhelming likelihood is that we will be used at a scale of culture, at a smaller scale than a whole society or western civilization or what have you, because we’re placed in much more specific locations where actually we can make a difference.

We can’t transform all of culture, but think about, let’s really zoom down to the smallest – in some ways the fundamental unit of culture is the home. Whatever our current home life or household life is, all of us started our life and acquired our cultural heritage from a home of some sort. Our parents or whoever were the people who raised us had tremendous influence at that scale. I can do very little to change the culture of America, but I’ve done a great deal, for better or for worse, to change the culture of the lives of two kids named Timothy and Amy who are 16 and 13. For them, I really shape culture. I decide when we sit down to dinner. I decide what we have for dinner. I decide what we talk about at dinner. All these are tremendously formative choices that I can make.
Well, scale it up a little bit from that. My home is on a block and on our block, just outside the house where I’m sitting, there’s about ten houses. It’s a small block. Well, I have a lot to say about the culture of our block. How often do I go outside? When I see my neighbors, how do I relate to them? Do I greet them? Do I know their names? Do I know their stories? Do I invite them over? I have a lot of influence over the culture of this block and not many other people, only about ten other households, have that influence.

When you scale down from these vast systems of culture to the very local places where we are, you discover that pretty much all of us can do something where we are.

*Andy Seidel:* Andy, a lot of times I work with the church and churches will ask, “How can I influence the culture around me?” So if you take a particular local church that exists within the local culture, how would they start to think about how can I have an influence on this culture around me? 

*Andy Crouch:* Two thoughts. The first is, you’ll do it the same way that culture is changed at every scale, and that’s by creating something primarily. I’ll put a footnote on that in a moment. Culture is changed when people make more culture. By that I mean very concrete things. You need to ask, what could we add to the culture of our community that’s not there right now that would move the horizons in some way, hopefully in a beneficial way. So you have to make something very tangible in a way.

The second thing is you’ve got to make it in public. So think about the culture of my block just for me as a private citizen. Right now I’m sitting in my basement. If all the things that I create stay in my basement – and sometimes as a writer you worry that that’s exactly what’s happening, but then people call you up on Skype and you think maybe it isn’t all hopeless. If I just stay in my basement, I could create amazing things here, but if I never take them out of my basement and share them with my neighbors it’s not going to change the culture of my block.
I think one of the things that churches can, one mistake that they can make is that they actually make in-group culture. That is, sometimes literally it happens in the church basement or in the fellowship hall or family life center or whatever, and we wait for the culture around us to come to us. Of course, you can invite people in, and that’s a very legitimate thing to do, but if you want to change the culture of your community you have to make something that actually is out in public for your community.

You have to realize, most people who aren’t already connected with your church, they drive by and your church is a black box to them or beige or brown or whatever box. They do not see anything that happens inside that box. They only see what touches their lives. So I hope that churches would start thinking about, what could we create out in the public realm. Not necessarily even our whole city, just our neighborhood, that our neighbors could interact with, see, and have some sense of participation in. Otherwise, you’re not changing the culture of your neighborhood, you’re just changing the culture of your church.

**Andy Seidel:** Good point.

**Darrell Bock:** I think that this is huge because I do think that churches tend to be insular. Of course, the tension that you have in a church is the tension between discipleship, which tends to draw you inward, and evangelism, which tends to take you outward. I think we wrestle in our churches with this relationship. The churches that tend to be more inward-focused and discipleship-oriented are sometimes slow to step out.

Another point that you make that I think is important is you talk about the importance of service as a part of cultural engagement. Part of what we’re talking about here is not just culture, we’re talking about engaging the culture and engaging the culture in helpful ways. Cultural engagement assumes engaging. I like to use the metaphor of an ambassador. An ambassador goes to a country. He represents another country by his presence, but he doesn’t live in the embassy. I mean, he lives in the embassy, but he doesn’t live in the embassy.?

**Andy Crouch:** Doesn’t stay in the embassy.
Darrell Bock: Exactly right. He can’t just park in the embassy and stay there and represent his country well. He’s got to interact with the country leaders. He’s got to get to know the country and the culture. He’s got to really engage. I think sometimes when we think about cultural engagement we do it in a way where we tell the culture or we dictate to the culture or something like that and we don’t engage the culture. We don’t interact with the culture.

It’s through the interaction, and particularly the service, which you highlight. I’m trying to bring these two ideas together. The service that we can do in the culture, that we can create at least an impression of a different kind of way of living.

Andy Crouch: Yes.

Darrell Bock: Which itself is an artifact. Go ahead.?

Andy Crouch: I think that’s very good. Actually, let me connect it back to what you said a moment ago because I think this is a very important point. I totally understand why we all think this way, but you said, well, you have evangelism, which takes us out, but then you have discipleship and that tends to happen more inside. I would actually say we’ve got to change the way we think about that. We need to recognize that discipleship actually crucially involves the way we live outside.

Andy Seidel: Very good.

Darrell Bock: Absolutely. It’s mission. If mission isn’t a part of discipleship you’re not being a disciple.?

Andy Crouch: And the greatest thing that most church leaders are overlooking right now is the discipleship realities, I might say, of where their people spend most of their time, which is in the culture, in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces, in school. We have people for maybe a morning and an evening or maybe a little more than that in a typical week at church. The rest of the time they’re out in the world, but what’s happening out in that world? They are being challenged to create things. That’s what work is, cultivating and creating, taking care of what’s already there and adding to it.
They’re doing that not just in paid work but in volunteering and participation in the community as well as their homes. We have often not seen that every one of those places where people are is a venue for discipleship of some sort. You’re going to be conformed to some image. Either you’re going to live out your work, live out your volunteer service in your community, live out your life at home shaped by the gospel or shaped by other values and by other cultures in a way. So we’re neglecting this vast arena for discipleship, which is where our people are spending most of their time, because we don’t talk about it and we often can’t envision it or we don’t have a Christian imagination for it.

You might say that what actually happens in the church is a subset of discipleship. Maybe the word to use is formation. I need to be formed by the gospel, through worship, through study, through prayer, through fellowship. But formation is just a small part of discipleship, and discipleship should take me out into the place where I work and the places where I live and spend my life. It’s there that I either bear witness to the gospel in everything that I do or I don’t. We need to reframe it so that we think of discipleship as mostly happening out there, not just happening in here.

Darrell Bock: Now, I’ve got two Andys here on the other side of these mikes. I’m gonna turn to Andy Seidel here a second and ask him a question. You were a pastor for a while, and when you listen to what Andy is saying and you hear him talk about the way in which we tend – I actually think this is a way in which culture’s impacted us. We’ve almost secularized our lives in the way our culture has taught us to secularize our lives. There’s the stuff that I do in church and it’s separate from the state over here, what I do in my life.

Andy Seidel: Right.

Darrell Bock: When you listen to this, Andy, and you think about the pastor, Andy Seidel, what are you hearing that makes you think, maybe I should be preaching different or maybe I should be communicating differently? How do I help people to think holistically, if I can use that word, about the way in which their lives work and their discipleship works? What do you sense from our conversation is the takeaway for a pastor who’s thinking about teaching and preaching?
Andy Seidel: I think mainly it is to think about the people that you’re preaching to. They spend most of their lives out there, outside of the church. So the idea is to really focus on that and how they represent Jesus Christ in that secular world –

Darrell Bock: So the illustrations that you engage in when you teach and preach have to engage the life of your community and has to challenge them. I hear a lot of preaching where we talk about what happens in the home.?

Andy Crouch: Yes.

Andy Seidel: That’s right.

Darrell Bock: We do that pretty well, but then the question –


Darrell Bock: What happens in the church and then, even more, what happens in the 9:00 to 5:00 time that you spend at work? Your 40 hours a week, which is your major energy investment outside your family that you engage in, what does that look like? Do you help your people in the church imagine and envision what that life could be like connected to their walk with God? Do we do enough of that when we preach?

Andy Seidel: No, we don’t do nearly enough of that, and we need to do that because that’s the primary way that we influence the world.?

Andy Crouch: I would add, some interesting studies have been done on how pastors talk about the wider world. Darrell, you made a very good point, that the home, actually we talk a fair amount about. There’s a kind of sense of responsibility for helping people with discipleship in the home. Scotty McLennan and Laura Nash wrote this book called Church on Sunday, Work on Monday. They looked at how pastors addressed issues of work, the 9:00 to 5:00 work. They found that most pastors didn’t mention it for weeks on end.

Darrell Bock: It’s the black hole of life.?

Andy Crouch: You can go a long time.
Andy Seidel: Yes. Most pastors have no experience of that.

Andy Crouch: Because they don’t know that world. And then when they did mention it, it was always framed negatively, especially the world of business was framed as mostly a matter of greed. So gosh, if you’re in the business world, boy, it must be hard with all that greed surrounding you all the time. Well, there is greed in business. There’s also greed in the church, by the way.

Darrell Bock: Just a touch. [Laughter]?

Andy Crouch: But there’s a lot of other things going on, and most business people most days are not seeing their work primarily through the lens of greed. Here’s the other thing, while I was writing my book I started listening to the sermons I was hearing in my church. I go to a fairly prosperous suburban church. A lot of the people were quite successful in their work world and influential in their work world. As Andy said, there’s a lot of influence going on here.

I started listening for the anecdotes in the sermons where there was an illustration of faithfulness in one way or another. I think in 18 months – this is just one church, but I did not hear a single illustration of someone who behaved in a notably faithful way where that person was not a pastor, a missionary, or a volunteer in some way.


Andy Crouch: There was one time where the illustration began by talking about this guy who was a successful small business owner and was fair to his employees and his business did really well. I thought, ah, they’re breaking the streak. We’re about to get a really great example of a faithful –

Darrell Bock: Finally an exception.

Andy Crouch: And then the punch line was, he sold his business and went to Bolivia as a missionary. I thought, oh, you were so close. [Laughter]?
Andy Crouch: This is not atypical. We do not tell stories about people positively influencing the world through their activity in the world. I think sometimes it’s because we need to recruit volunteers for the church, and so we make the world sound worse than it is in order to make the church sound better than it is.

Darrell Bock: That’s interesting. There are a couple of ways that you can deal with this. One is to think through – a lot of business is about relationships and network building and that kind of thing. It’s not the exchange of goods that happens, it’s the relationships that are built in the midst of doing that work. We need to invest that with a value and with an appreciation, like we do the relationships in our homes, and give it the same kind of attention. That’s one way I think we can do it is to encourage pastors to think about how they talk about the business life and business square where most people live.

The second thing is, there are times in churches where you can have testimonies and people talk about their lives. Well, why not interview the people who are out there in the public square who are making the effort and who know that world rather than the pastor doing it secondhand? Again, you’re talking about creating an artifact. You’re creating an environment in the church that nurtures the whole of life as people are living it. Isn’t that really what we’re discussing here??

Andy Crouch: Absolutely. I will say, what you’ll find when you set out to interview people like that, which I think is a wonderful idea, is that most of them have never been given the vocabulary to talk about what they’re doing in a Christian frame. They’ve had to just sort of make it up as they go along. Be prepared for folks to not be able to articulate why what they do is significant in kingdom terms, not because it isn’t significant and not because they aren’t faithful in how they do it, but the church has never given them the language.

Andy Seidel: Right.
Andy Crouch: So we need to start giving people the language for why what they do every day, whether they’re a mom who works primarily in the home and in the neighborhood or someone who runs a business or a lawyer or an accountant. By the way, accountants are always the hard question people ask me. They say, how can you do accounting as a Christian? I say, look, it’s about honesty. It’s about having the virtue of being willing to say things that are hard when you’d rather sort of shade the truth. It’s about keeping people committed to the truth about how their businesses are going. This is a deeply Christian thing to do. When people don’t do it faithfully, people end up being lied to and businesses end up being destroyed.

Every field, there’s a way to do it and to think about it theologically, but we haven’t given them ways to do that. So don’t be alarmed if you find that people aren’t very articulate at first. Help them discover why what they’re doing matters in the work of the kingdom.

Darrell Bock: Well, I think that what we’ve articulated by doing what we’ve done today is to show how you can think about cultural engagement on kind of this global CNN scale or you can think about it in a completely different way. In thinking about it in a completely different way there’s the opening up potential for avenues of thinking about cultural engagement in ways you’ve never thought about cultural engagement before. In doing so, the possibilities then open up to create these fresh artifacts or these fresh experiences of life that are now open to what God is doing and to theological engagement in a way that you weren’t thinking about before. I think that’s where your book pushes us. Is that a fair summary of the kind of intent of what you were after in terms of getting people to think about culture and cultural engagement??

Andy Crouch: Beautifully said. And I think our churches, the people in our churches are waiting for someone to unfold this to them. What you said is right. If you just think about culture as CNN or Fox or MSNBC or whatever, you’ll get really depressed. But if you think about it as the spheres where God has placed us and the scales that we have influence over, be they small or large, and that God has placed us there to, the language I like is to be image bearers in those places. This is tremendously good news, and people are not hearing about this from their pastors, but they could. It opens up a lot in scripture that we haven’t touched. It’s just good leadership to start addressing these things in our churches.
Darrell Bock: You just used the word leadership. That means I’m going o hand it over to Andy. What advice would you give to leaders as you reflect on what Andy and we have been discussing?

Andy Seidel: I think one thing in terms of church leaders, pastors, is to develop relationships with the business people in their church so that they know more what’s going on and so they could incorporate some of the things of the business world into their messages and talk about how this applies in the home but also outside the home in the business. I think one of the things that’s very interesting is that if we have a concern about reaching people, a lot of times they will listen more to a Christian business person in their own realm of experience than they will to a pastor, because we’re different.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, we’re seen as being disconnected from life.

Andy Seidel: That’s right.

Darrell Bock: It’s an irony. The pastor is seen as being disconnected from life, even though that’s the voice they often hear in the church. Then the pastor gets up and doesn’t connect to that life that most of the people are living, and so you get a disconnect.

Well, we’ve literally only scratched the surface in our time together in thinking about this. Andy, I appreciate your spending time with us there from a distance and connecting with us by Skype, something that wouldn’t have been possible 15 years ago. A good illustration of a cultural artifact. Hopefully, maybe in the future we can talk more about this, because I know this is a passion that we all share in helping the church think through how really is the best way to engage culture and to think about it differently than the way they normally do. So thank you very, very much.

Andy Crouch: Thanks for everything you’re doing. This is a wonderful conversation. So glad to be part of it.

Darrell Bock: Well, we’re glad to have you here at The Table and we’re glad you were able to join us at The Table, and we look forward to inviting you back for our new videocast. Thank you very much.