

## SESSION 2

# CULTURE

### **READ** **Acts 2**

Against all odds, the early Church championed the message and mission of the Gospel. In his book *Destroyer of the God*, scholar Larry Hurtado notes the reason for Christianity's success was largely due to the Church's distinctiveness. The early Church was extremely counter to the Roman Empire's culture, and their unique values and practices were the key to their survival. In addition to the Church's radical religious beliefs, Hurtado acknowledges the following five values that made Christianity distinct:

1. They were multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.
2. They cared for the poor.
3. They rescued and adopted babies who were discarded.
4. They maintained high standards of sexual ethics.
5. They forgave their enemies and lived non-violent lifestyles.

Unfortunately, our political alliances today have made these Christian values dichotomous. The Democratic Party values the first two, the Republican Party values the second two, and neither party values the last (especially as it relates to dialogue with each other!). Yet, it was ALL of these values together that made Christianity influential. It is imperative we view our faith outside of the confines of our political ties.

What would it look like today if we as the Church exemplified all these values in our culture today? What if we were "weird"—not for the sake of being "weird"—but for the sake of Christ and His Incarnational model of living?

In your emotional health assessment, take a look at your answers for Principle 6 ("Make Incarnation Your Model for Loving Well"). How have you exemplified a life that is distinctly different from your culture? How have you modeled the kind of love Jesus has for others?

If you are physically able, choose a day or a meal this week from which to fast. Fasting is perhaps the most unused spiritual discipline, but choosing to abstain from food helps us break the power of the flesh—our desires, sins, and cravings. During your fast, use your hunger pains as cues to pray. Pray God would help you break free from any habits you may have that do not reflect God's love and grace. Pray God would instill within you a fervor for His kingdom—even if that means breaking ties with the culture in which you presently reside.