

Discussion Questions for *A Church Called Tov*

Introduction: Where We Find Ourselves

1. Discuss with the group your understanding of the word *tov*, based on how it is described in the introduction to the book.
2. As you begin your reading, what do you think would be some characteristics of a *tov* church?

Chapter 1: Every Church Is a Culture

1. “Like any organization, every church is a distinct culture, formed and nurtured and perpetuated by the ongoing interaction of leaders and congregants.” How would you describe the current culture in your church? What are its primary defining characteristics?
2. Culture is not a fixed or unchanging entity. It is constantly evolving. Describe how culture acts as an *agent*, forming the environment in which people interact, and how the people, in turn, *shape* the culture.
3. How have you been shaped or affected by the cultures in which you live? How have you been shaped by the culture in your church?
4. How can an individual affect the direction or characteristics of a church’s culture?

Chapter 2: Early Warning Signs of a Toxic Culture

1. If you see the early warning signs of *narcissism* and *power through fear* in your church, what can you do to resist and reform the negative culture?
2. Many pastors find themselves isolated from the congregation by the way their job is defined or perceived by their church. But isolation can be especially dangerous for narcissists and leaders who are prone to pursue power and control. What can be done to keep your pastor and other leaders connected, encouraged, and accountable?
3. In writing to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul says, “We ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. . . . I don’t want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message. . . . [God’s] power works best in weakness” (2 Corinthians 4:7; 12:6, 9). And the apostle John writes, “God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. . . . Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear” (1 John 4:16, 18). Given these foundational truths from the Bible, how does a power-through-fear culture become established in a church? How can it be prevented?

Chapter 3: How Toxic Church Cultures Respond to Criticism

1. “In a healthy, *tov* culture, leaders will avoid denial and spin, in favor of finding and telling the truth—even when the truth is painful.” Describe a time when you’ve seen this work. How did the church successfully approach each of the seven steps outlined on page 44?
2. Use the same seven-step process to discuss a time when a church chose denial and spin over telling the truth. How did the church leaders mishandle the seven steps and how could they have done better?
3. Read the story about Robert Cunningham and Tates Creek Presbyterian Church that begins on page 44. Discuss your response to the pastor’s approach—apologizing publicly and specifically to victims of abuse that occurred before he was even at the church. How can addressing past hurts and sins help or hurt a congregation?
4. Read Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Timothy 5:19, and 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. Using a specific example you’ve seen of sin in the church, how were these verses applied properly or improperly?

Chapter 4: False Narratives

1. Review the eight false narratives discussed in this chapter and discuss a time when you’ve seen one or more being used to cover up sin in the church. What can be done to counteract false narratives?

Chapter 5: Creating a Goodness Culture

1. What does it mean for a church culture to be *good*?
2. The authors say, “We don’t create *tov* churches in our own strength, by grit and determination or by clever programming.” In practical terms, how *do* we create a *tov* church?

Chapter 6: *Tov* Churches Nurture Empathy

1. The Circle of *Tov* begins with empathy and compassion. What are some practical ways you can begin to foster a culture of empathy and compassion in your congregation?
2. Who are the marginalized groups within your sphere of influence? How can you help to make their needs more visible within your congregation?
3. How can you empower others in their giftedness and encourage those gifts to flourish within the body of Christ and in the world?

Chapter 7: *Tov* Churches Nurture Grace

1. “Grace-filled goodness begins in forgiveness, forms into freedom, and resists fear—all because it knows that God’s design for the church is love.” In practical terms, what does it mean for a church culture to be grace-filled?

2. What is the relationship between *grace* and *trust*? How does building one help to build the other?

Chapter 8: *Tov* Churches Nurture a People-First Culture

1. What is the difference between the church as an institution and the church as a people-first culture? What changes are needed in your church to make it more people-first?
2. What factors make it difficult to see other people as God's image-bearers? What can you do to overcome those obstacles?
3. What can you and your church do to enfold others into your community?
4. What does it mean to have Jesus-like eyes for people? How would adopting that perspective change the way you interact with other people?

Chapter 9: *Tov* Churches Nurture Truth

1. We've all heard the phrase "speaking the truth in love," but what does that actually look like in practice? How does love work to temper the seeming harshness of some truths?
2. "A culture of truth telling can only be formed through the disciplines of knowing the truth, doing the truth, and surrendering to the truth." Discuss your understanding of these three aspects of truth telling. What does each one require of you?
3. What can you do to promote a spirit of Yom Kippur in your church? What are the consequences of skipping over Yom Kippur in our Christian practice?

Chapter 10: *Tov* Churches Nurture Justice

1. Define *justice*.
2. As this book was going to press, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis renewed calls for justice in American culture. What can the church do to become a model of justice for our culture?
3. What does it mean promote justice in situations where the effects of sin cannot be undone—as in cases of sexual, emotional, or physical abuse, or even death?
4. Why do churches tolerate sinful behavior by pastors and other leaders? How does toxic loyalty interfere with the achievement of justice?

Chapter 11: *Tov* Churches Nurture Service

1. What are the essential elements of a culture of service? What is the key to creating a culture of service?

2. How can a church celebrate acts of service (to encourage a culture of service) without tempting people to serve in order to be seen or celebrated?
3. How can a church make goodness and service *ordinary*?
4. What can a church do to *resist* a culture of celebrity while seeking to maximize the use of spiritual giftings in the leadership and the congregation?

Chapter 12: *Tov* Churches Nurture Christlikeness

1. What are the differences between an achievement and accomplishment culture and a Christlike culture?
2. How does a leadership-based culture differ from a shepherding culture?
3. What is a church, and what is the primary role of pastors?
4. What is a Christlike way to define *success*?
5. Looking back at your answer to question 2 in the introduction, what would now add to your list of characteristics of a *tov* church?
6. Based on what you have learned in this book, what do you think it would take for your church to become a *tov* church?