

Cultivating a culture of love

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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Recently, I was reading another article that said that the church should be like Apple computers and pastors ought to be like Steve Jobs. We would, the argument goes, be in much better shape if we all acted like the iconic business man. There have been a lot of posts, articles and sermons to this effect since Jobs died a year ago.

I understand. I love technology. We church leaders crave his creativity, vision, and—of course—extraordinary success. We like to learn from other disciplines and Jobs had an amazing way of bringing out the best work in certain people.

Plus, we have a tendency to honor those who have gone before us. We overlook their wrongs and see the deeper purpose of their lives.

But, I beg of you, please, if you are writing a *Gospel According to Apple Computers*, put down the pen. We don't need any *iChurch* books. We don't need to be lusting

after the skills of a man who made shiny phones. I have an iPhone. And an iPad. And a MacBook Pro. But as I use them, I confess that I live in a fallen and broken world. I don't pray that God would make me more like Steve Jobs.

As churches, our purpose is to love God and love our neighbor. That's why we exist. As much as I long for innovation, beauty, creativity and design in our worshiping communities, those things cannot be our goal. Loving our neighbor is our goal. And it's a really tough job these days.

We try to love our neighbor even as the income disparity in our nation keeps growing wider and wider.

So why would we try to emulate a company who condones sweatshops while hoarding profits? Why would we want to be like a man whose income rivaled the gross national product of many countries?

We try to love our neighbor, even as we live in a society that refuses healthcare for the working poor.

In our country, men and women work sixty hours a week, and they still do not have the resources to seek medical help for themselves or for their children. Companies like Apple build factories overseas so that they can take advantage of laborers who have medical coverage through other governments.

You may be thinking, *Why does it matter? I mean, can't we just overlook the worker abuse and income distribution and appreciate Jobs's creativity and vision?*

I don't think so, because I'm not sure that Jobs's vision or creativity could have been carried out without those factories that we would never allow our own sons and daughters to work in. A cheap iPhone, made by fairly-paid workers, is not possible. But now we have our unfair phones. Our culture has adapted to them. Our lives rely upon them.

A culture becomes what we celebrate. I often think of [this conversation](#), where William Sloane Coffin has some wise words for Paul Raushenbush:

The churches are a reflection of the truth of Plato's statement, "What's honored in the country will be cultivated there." When we got started as a country, we had no more than 3 million people—less than Los Angeles County today. Yet we

turned out Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, Adams, Hamilton—you can name a list as long as your arm. How many people on the public stage can you name today who are of the caliber of those first men? And why aren't there more? Because what's honored in the country will be cultivated there.

Or how come those itty, bitty Italian city-states turned out one fantastic painter and sculptor after another? Because every kid couldn't wait to get his mitt on a paint brush. What's honored in the country will be cultivated there. We have fantastic athletes. I watched the Spurs and Lakers yesterday. Those guys play basketball like nobody's business. Yet we have mediocre politicians, and the clergy is pretty mediocre also. But what's honored in a country will be cultivated there. The greatest recession in this country is not economic; it's spiritual. And so the great biblical mandates of pursuing justice and seeking peace are shortchanged.

If we continue to celebrate and honor those who committed the greatest sins of the last five decades, we may become like them. And when one's vision cannot be separated from the abuses, I don't think that's a good thing.