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Focus On Mission:
Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

BEING CHURCH

KENT R. HUNTER

with TRACEE J. SWANK

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Scripture references in this book are from *The Message* version. Why? According to the brilliant translator, Eugene Peterson, it's not meant to be a scholarly study Bible. It's meant to be a life-learning, engaging Bible that helps you to appropriate God's teaching to everyday life. God's plan is to effectively change your life through the divine power of His Word.

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ISBN: 9798279479504

Printed in the United States of America

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Introduction

“We are the church together. All who follow Jesus, all around the world—we are the church.” Yeah, that little song says a lot! Equally important, it declares what the church is *not*. The church is not a building. It is not an organization. The church is not a political entity. It is not just a “place” where you worship.

The church is *people*—those who follow Jesus...all around the world. The church is the sum total of all believers in every country, in every century. Those who died in Christ are eternally...church. The cemetery is filled with church people. If that seems odd, just take a look when the resurrection of the dead occurs.

There are those who focus on “going” to church. Yet, the church is more than a destination. We *are* the church. We *do* church. Christian life is *being* the church. It is who we are. It is what we have become.

Being church is not simply a project at a building where people worship. The church is alive! 24/7. Believers are church their whole lives—and, in all eternity.

Doing church is not the end result of life in Christ. Being church, every day, is the greatest impact believers bring to this world.

Being over Doing: Rediscovering Grace in the Christian Life

Some Christians occasionally fall into the subtle trap: “I have to *do something* to be a good Christian.” Some church leaders subconsciously promote this un-Christian, works-oriented attitude. No one means to, yet it happens.

Start with the end result and discover your way to what God’s gift in Jesus is really all about. “*New Christians*” are those who have not described themselves as followers of Jesus for very long. “*Young Christians*” are a little more difficult to diagnose: They are “young” in biblical understanding and subconsciously have fallen into the trap that says, “As a Christian, we must *do* things that validate faith.” The “doing” can include attending church regularly, volunteering, donating money, and stuff like that. These folks are more challenging to diagnose. Why? They are theologically young but may have been seen as “good church members” for forty years!

Here’s what happens: These well-meaning Christians have never gone deep into Scripture. Yet, that is the only way to get over the greatest conundrum of faith life: Forgiveness is 100 percent a free gift. It’s what God does, not what we do.

Often, these well-meaning people come up with great ideas about what the church should do. Another program! Over time, many activities crowd spiritual dimensions of life. New Christians look around and get the idea that faith—the Christian

life—is all about doing stuff. This guts the heart of the faith and steals the power of successful mission. This is the sneaky, subtle work of the Enemy.

To be sure, faith without works is dead (James 2:17). However, the greatest challenge for most Christians is to grasp—and live life—is recognizing that works without faith is an eternal disaster.

In Romans 4:1-6, Paul tries desperately to straighten out Jews who are new Christ-followers. However, this is not just a Jewish challenge. It is a human challenge. Paul points out how easy it is to look at Abraham, “a hero of faith,” and not at the idea that he was approved by God for what he did for God. Paul clarifies this: Abraham was great because of what God did *for him*. You work at your job; you deserve to get paid. But salvation is a job too big for anyone. Only God can do it. And He does it—through Jesus. It is a sheer gift, 100 percent. This is liberating! This is when you become a missionary. Powerful!

Being the Church: Shifting from Busyness to Discipleship

Some people work too hard at doing church. It is common to see burned-out pastors and staff as well as exhausted church leaders.

Sometimes we in the church work too hard at the wrong things. When pastors are encouraged to disciple people into ministry, like Scripture says in Ephesians 4, their response is, “Oh—now, more work!” Yet, the whole idea of salvation is not about works but about God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

In Hebrews 10:6-13, Paul (who also wrote Ephesians!) says: The word of faith—confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord—*welcomes God to go to work*—and go to work for us.“ As a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it! Then he sat down right beside God and waited for his enemies to cave in.... By a single offering, he did everything that needed to be done for everyone who takes part in the purifying process” (Hebrews 10:11-18).

Most Christians get it: We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ—not by works. However, then—to operate the Church—the body of Christ—we work like crazy! Could it be that we have the wrong strategy? Do we “do” church? Or “are” we Church? Is Jesus the Head of the Church? Or do we push that expectation on church staff and leaders? Do we operate as a *body* or as a *corporation*?

When Jesus gave the marching orders, He said, “Therefore go and make disciples...” (Matthew 28:19 NIV).

“It sounds like work to me!” say many people. Wrong! On two counts: (1) Making disciples occurs when, *as you go about life* as a Christian, you take someone with you. You invite them: “Come, follow me” (Matthew 4:19 NIV). It flows like this: I do; you watch. Then I do; you help. Then you do; I help. Then you do; I watch. Then we BOTH repeat this with others, over and over and over. Soon we have an army of disciples who are disciple-makers. (2) When Jesus says, “...go and make disciples,” the word actually implies, “as you go,” or more specifically, “as you go about your daily life.” *Making disciples* is not a program. It is a way of life—a lifestyle.

The platform for growing the Kingdom isn’t a church building. It’s relationships. Each Christian’s primary mission field is their *social network*.

Why do we trust God for our own salvation and then practically kill ourselves to reach others? Mainly because we have warped the movement into a bureaucracy!

Belong, Believe, Become: The Biblical Model for Discipleship

In Acts 8:26-39, Phillip encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. How would you feel if you went down in history identified as a eunuch? The American eunuch? The British eunuch? The Chinese eunuch?

How could the Scriptures be so—personal? Perhaps because Christianity is a culture of total acceptance. When Jesus met someone, it didn't matter if they were an adulterer, prostitute, despised tax collector, or leper. They belonged—they were accepted.

I grew up in a church—a great church with a great pastor. The traditional system was: believe → become → belong. I went through their tradition of confirmation instruction. Then I got a certificate that said I was a “member” of the church—the institution. Then I could take the Lord's Supper. Then I belonged.

Jesus did it differently: belong → believe → become → behave. And Phillip operated in that culture of grace and love. And the Ethiopian eunuch would have felt the love.

Phillip wasn't hung up on the institution. After some teaching, the eunuch said (8:36), “Here's water. Why can't I be baptized?” How Phillip did *not* respond is instructive. He didn't schedule a baptism the following Sunday at a church building. Phillip was

part of a movement, not an institution. Phillip went down into the water with the Ethiopian man and baptized him on the spot.

This is the spontaneous expansion of the Christian movement. This is the explosive growth of the faith.

Isn't God a God of order? Yes—definitely. But the order doesn't preclude the movement. It serves the movement from a subordinated position. Too many churches have that turned around. Christianity is not centered in an institution. It is a movement.

Are you are movement person for Jesus? Move the movement!

Disciples, Not Church Members: The True Mission

Honestly? Most Christians work too hard at trying to grow their church. They work too hard at making disciples. They work too hard at doing the wrong things. They work too hard at *programs*.

In Ephesians 4:17-25, Paul is writing to long-term “church members” (synagogue members), Jews who were fixated on all the stuff you have to **do** to please God.

Paul uses the Jewish hero Abraham as an example. God promised old Abraham and infertile Sarah they would have children. This was long before Viagra and infertility drugs! They had no hope directed at anything but God’s promise. The pregnancy that resulted was God’s miracle, God’s work, not theirs.

Nowhere does it say in the Bible that we grow the Church. However, if you look at the calendar at most churches, we sure act like we grow the Church! Paul’s great message in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 is all about the primary essence of how God works. He does it all. We don’t. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18 NIV). By observation, most church leaders don’t believe that!

So, what is the point—do nothing? Of course not! Jesus did ask us to do just one thing: Grow disciples—make disciples. What

He's talking about is disciples of Jesus Christ, not disciples of a community church. Disciples, not church members.

Here is the bottom line—and it's, in essence, the same issue Paul is raising with the Jewish-work-your-way-through-religion people. Do you, does your church, really believe that if you spent every ounce of church energy worshipping God and making disciples (who make disciples—and are therefore disciplers), your church would grow? It doesn't seem like you do—or you wouldn't have all those activities that burn people out and take them away from the only things God asked of you: Worship Him and grow disciples.

Faith First: Returning to the Core Mission of the Church

What are the basics of the Christian faith? If you drill down to the central message, what is it? Do most church people get it? Do most preachers make it their focus? Can you clearly articulate it?

In Paul's letter to Titus, he begins with first things first. He clarifies to this young leader the top priorities, the nonnegotiables.

Here is the backstory. Paul was involved in launching a Christian community—a church—in Crete. As usual, he demonstrated something rare among many pastors and church leaders today. Paul multiplied himself—he discipled Titus.

On any given weekday, thousands of pastors will visit someone in the hospital to minister to them. Our research demonstrates that less than 5 percent will take someone with them to equip them to do the work of ministry. This is a modern tragedy for the Christian movement.

This multiplication process is called discipling. It is the centerpiece of a movement: a culture of multiplication. It was modeled by Jesus and by His followers, like Paul. It is disturbingly absent among most Christians, church leaders, and even pastors today.

What we see in this letter to Titus is an apostle nurturing his disciple even through this letter. He is, in the opening four verses, underscoring the key priorities of faith. As we join in, consider this: How often is this content the centerpiece of your church, the foundation of the faith you confess, and the baseline for ministry in your life and in your congregation? How well do Christians, and your church in general, clearly articulate these basics? How clearly does your life reflect them?

Paul begins by confessing that he is “God’s slave and Christ’s agent for promoting the faith...” (Titus 1:1). Three key nonnegotiables are demonstrated here: (1) God *owns* Paul—like a slave is owned by a master; (2) Paul is an *agent* of Christ—a representative; (3) Paul’s central purpose? *Promoting the faith*.

Is it your priority to promote the faith? By “priority,” I mean is it that which you always do first? Is it your main mission in life, no matter who you are or what you do? Is it the priority and the driving mission of your church? Is it reflected in the activities and the very culture of your congregation? Is it your personal priority—demonstrated by your life?

Paul continues, “...getting out the *accurate* word on God and how to respond rightly to it.” How central is it to your ambition to grow the “accuracy” about what Jesus taught—what Scripture teaches?

Paul continues saying that his *aim* is “to raise hopes.” Hope is huge in the Christian faith. So, what is the real power of hope? Paul clarifies, “by pointing the way to life without end” (Titus 1:1-4). How often is heaven—eternity—a part of your discourse with others? Do you hear it from the pulpit regularly?

Paul ends this opening to Titus by articulating his authority—and yours! He says, “I’ve been entrusted to proclaim this Message by order of our Savior, God himself.” Guess what? You have that same authority. So does your church. The question is: *Is that clearly apparent?*

Faith in a Corrupt Culture: Can the Church Still Make a Difference?

Human beings aren't perfect, and Christians are not an exception. As believers, we really can't represent ourselves as more *perfect* than others. We are forgiven, and that makes life a whole lot better. Yet, it does not make us arrogant. Actually, just the opposite. We are humbled and grateful for God's grace. Just because we are believers doesn't mean we have "arrived." We are on a never-ending journey, so long as we are breathing.

From that perspective, Paul writes his letter to the Romans. It is a powerful document. Only God knows the full extent to which it landed in corrupt Rome—and provided a compass to help a wayward empire return to health and vitality.

Paul begins, in Romans 1:18, to diagnose life in the cesspool of that culture. He references creation and asks: *How can you miss God?* "But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is!" (1:19). He points out their refusal to treat God like God. He analyzes the real issue: "...they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives" (1:21-23). Wow, did Paul listen to this morning's newscast just before he wrote this?

The scariest thing about God is that He *allows* people to self-destruct. God is no tyrant, and we are not His puppets. He describes Rome as a "pigpen ... filthy inside and out" (1:24).

Fake news is one thing. But Paul says they have traded the true God for a fake god. Nothing like getting to the issue behind the issue!

Paul demonstrates that if we refuse to know God, we lose our humanity. That ought to be a major kick in the butt for all our churches today who have lost the ability to reach unbelievers in our deteriorating culture.

Wow, Paul is willing to be politically incorrect! He talks about people “sexually confused,” men having sex with men, women having sex with women. Ouch! Or: Hooray! And therein lies the divide.

You could say Paul was obnoxious and politically incorrect. Yet don't forget—Rome did experience a turnaround. Did this letter help? Could it help today? Absolutely!

From Activities to Authenticity: Becoming True Citizens of the Kingdom

It seems an odd way to launch the greatest movement in history. Yet, this is what Jesus did: He gathered twelve ordinary guys and spent most of His time telling them stories. Jesus said, on a few occasions, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36 NIV), which means it is not anything like this world.

Christians are called citizens of this Kingdom. Yet much of what we do in churches and in life does not reflect Kingdom culture. In Acts 19:8-10, Paul taught for months in the meeting place. It says he tried “his best to make *the things of the kingdom of God* real and convincing to them.”

The “things of the Kingdom” are values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews. Think of these five “Kingdom things” as DNA that represents the culture of God’s Kingdom. These make the Kingdom real and convincing.

Christians and churches constantly drift from the culture of their King and His Kingdom. This makes Christians and their churches weak and ineffective. They lack some of the DNA of the Kingdom.

This DNA is not what you do but who you are and who you become. Church people seem obsessed with programs and are often worn out on activities. Christianity is a movement, like the flu: You catch it from people who have it. It’s not a program; it

is relational. It is a holy infection, not a church program. You, like Paul, “make the things of the kingdom of God real.”

Fruit That Endures: Measuring Life by God's Standards

What would you like said at your funeral? Would you want someone to say that you are a great person? Or that you knew a great God? Or you achieved a lot? Or God used you, and through you He achieved so much for eternity?

What kind of legacy will you leave? Will it be that you built stuff, made money, became famous, or had a bunch of kids and grandkids? What validates the fact that you lived? In the terminology of Scripture, what will be the “fruit” that lasts from your life—beyond your life?

In 2 Corinthians 3:1-6, Paul reflects on this central issue: What really matters? It is the fruit that lasts and makes a difference in life.

Paul says the only thing that matters and lasts is the lives you touched for eternity. It's all about how God, and only God, can use you to make an eternal difference in the lives of others. Paul says, “...*you*, written by Christ himself for God, are our letter of recommendation” (3:4). It is not a long, complicated document with pages of legal footnotes, the tedious overload “killing your spirit” (3:6). It's God's Holy Spirit working through you to change the eternal destiny of others.

I think about all the theological jargon I had to learn at seminary. Yet no one showed me or told me how I could be used by the

Holy Spirit to change lives for eternity. That is a tragedy. I think it's a spiritual travesty.

So many churches have members involved in activity that has little or no eternal significance. People hear so many sermons focused on repeating the same doctrinal details Christians have heard forever. God's people sit there, spiritually constipated. Most aren't disciplined to share Christ, even if they wanted to do so. Heck, most don't know how to pray in public—or at least they think so. No wonder some churches are failing!

You can get many Christians involved to launch the Christmas bazaar, a bake sale, or a rummage sale. But making an eternal difference in the life of a friend? Not so much.

Many Christians have lost divine focus and replaced it with mountains of busyness that, as Paul says, is “killing your spirit.”

What will God say about you at your funeral?

God's True Project: Making Disciples, Not Just Running Programs

In Hebrews 9, Paul speaks about his huge sorrow and enormous pain. The Israelites, God's chosen people, had everything going for them: family, glory, God's covenant, promises, revelation, worship. Yet, most of them missed Jesus Christ altogether! They were too preoccupied in their own "God projects."

There is a parallel today among Christians who believe in Christ but are so involved in "church projects." They lose sight of their number one mission—to reach the lost and make disciples who make disciples.

There is a significant contrast between religion and spirituality. Religion is the form, going through the motions. Spirituality is a relationship that builds other relationships, to introduce Christ to those who do not yet know Him. This is called "mission."

Sometimes Christians are so wrapped up in so-called "God projects"—church programs—they have come to believe those activities represent the primary mission of the church. The Great Commission is God's primary project. Jesus stated that clearly: "Therefore go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19 NIV).

Jesus didn't give the Great Commission to a "corporation" called church. He gave it to each individual Christ-follower.

First, He gave it to the disciples. They became apostles—“sent people,” “people on a mission.” One of these apostles, Paul, made it clear: Every Christ-follower is an ambassador for Christ.

Many Christians focus too much energy on running the “rage of the machine” called church. The local church becomes a corporation focused on management rather than an army focused on mission—the mission of love and forgiveness in Jesus.

Does that cause you enormous pain? Huge sorrow? If not, why not?

Holy Ground: Approaching the Lord's Supper with Reverence

For centuries, Christians have honestly wrestled with the intent of Scripture concerning what Paul calls the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23. Is it symbolic? Is it the real, true body and blood of Jesus? Is Christ really present, in, with, and under the bread and wine—meaning it's both bread and wine *and* body and blood?

Without a doubt, it is one of the most difficult portions of Scripture to understand. And that may be the center of the issue. Can human beings really grasp or understand how this works? It is another part of our spiritual life that we accept by faith. Like so many aspects of God, the human mind can't figure it out. It's beyond our experience. Yet, God has entered this world in Jesus so we can experience Him. In Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, he says, "For who has known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:34 NKJV, a reflection of Isaiah 40:13-14).

As Paul continues his letter to the church at Corinth, he focuses on the *practice* of the Lord's Supper. Clearly, this is no Happy Meal from McDonald's—not even your typical church potluck! Paul says that every time you engage in this meal, you reenact the death of the Master.

Paul continues, indicating that anyone who takes this lightly or irreverently joins the crowd that mocked and crucified Jesus.

That is heavy stuff! The point? Examine your motives. Check your respect for this holy, awesome taste of Jesus' sacrifice. Wow!

If you grab onto this meal in a flippant, "burger and fries" approach, there are serious consequences. It can cause you to get sick and even die! Now, that's a fairly rare sermon to hear about that subject! It's also about as mysterious as the bread/body/wine/blood thing. Heavy stuff!

The bottom line? Come to the meal with reverence. You are walking on holy ground! You're right there at the cross. You're in touch with your Savior. According to 1 Corinthians 11:23-34, you are in a spiritual love feast!

Radical Welcome: Becoming the Church That Embraces Everyone

After interviewing thousands of church members in one-on-one, confidential settings, there are many interesting anomalies about the issue of friendliness.

If you were to ask those in your congregation, what would you learn? In most churches, the common response would be: “Oh yes, very friendly!” What would you learn if you asked the same question of *newcomers*? In most congregations, the majority of newcomers would say, “Not so much.” How can that be? What’s the real picture?

What if you were an undercover guest? For most churches, the answer would be: “Not really!”

Most church people are friendly—to each other. You come to know people at the church over the years. You see them before and after worship. You connect with those with whom you have developed a friendship.

You can observe this in every church. Before and after worship, many worshippers form a “holy huddle”: people standing in a circle, enjoying fellowship, with their backs to the outside of the huddle. For a guest to get in on their fellowship, to experience face-to-face connection, they’d have to get on their knees, crawl between someone’s legs, and pop up in the middle. Most newcomers won’t do that!

In Romans 16:1-2, Paul asked the Christians in the faith community in Rome to welcome Phoebe “with all the generous hospitality we Christians are famous for.” So, what do most churches do? They ask for volunteers to be “greeters” at the doors. It becomes a “mechanical program.” However, it’s not supposed to be a duty. It’s not something you do. It’s about who you are and who you become, by the power of Christ. It is an element of the Christian culture.

We analyzed a couple thousand churches and discovered “contagious hospitality” in two: one in Lincoln, Nebraska, and another in Phoenix, Arizona. In these churches, hospitality is *not* a program—it’s the culture. It’s everywhere. It’s in the atmosphere. It’s not a few volunteers. It’s the atmosphere of a Christian lifestyle, not a program! Above all, you need to know this: *This culture is caught, not taught.* It begins with leaders who live it, and it rubs off on others. That is the way children learn behaviors from their parents. It’s the way the children of God learn behavior from their leaders. What is God saying to your church? And what are you going to do about it?

The Church's Twofold Mission: Nurturing Believers and Spreading the Gospel

From the early days of the Christian movement, God has used two types of ministries to further the Kingdom. One of them is the local church. This is the community of believers in a specific location, or a group representing a cluster of congregations, sometimes called a church body or denomination.

In the study of missions, called missiology, these church “structures” are called “modalities.” They play a vital part in the Christian movement. They nurture, disciple, teach, preach, and grow Christians to maturity. They also reach out to those who are unchurched in their geographical areas. Paul’s letters in the New Testament are targeted to believers in a certain area. In some cases, these local areas would be a cluster of house churches in a certain city. These modality units are focused on nurturing believers and equipping them to share their faith locally.

On the other hand, most of the letters in the New Testament report other ministries beyond the scope of the local churches. Scripture reports itinerant preachers, missionaries, teachers, evangelists, and others. They travel and have what might be called a “big-picture specialty ministry.” These ministries, which are not focused on a local congregation, are called “sodalities.”

In the third letter from John in the New Testament, there is one of many references to those who had a sodality ministry. In this

short, one-chapter letter, John speaks to the congregation pastored by Gaius. John writes, "...extend hospitality to Christian brothers and sisters, even when they are strangers" (3 John 5). He says, when you do this, "...you make the faith visible."

These "strangers" had ministries that were specialized. They traveled beyond the area of the local church. John says, "So they deserve any support we can give them." He adds, "...we become their companions in spreading the truth" (3 John 5-8).

Both ministry structures—modalities and sodalities—have important roles in the expansion of God's Kingdom. Those called to sodality ministries are like "pioneers." They are out on the front lines. They are cutting-edge ministries, taking "new ground" and helping the local church become stronger, better, and more impactful for growing the Kingdom. Christians drawn to modalities—like the local church or a denominational structure—are more like "homesteaders." They grow and nurture, develop and train new Christians and disciple them in lifelong ministries. Modalities face the temptation to develop a "fortress" mentality. They can become self-centered. They can resist appropriate change and innovation and perpetuate worn-out delivery systems. Their motto can become: "We've always done it that way." They become lost in their own woods. Sodality ministries help them see the forest *and* the trees.

When modalities become spiritually sick and self-centered, they no longer support sodality ministries. In fact, they ignore and even discourage cutting-edge sodality efforts. The pioneers, without support, can no longer function. Unhealthy modalities "eat sodalities for lunch." The movement stalls.

John's directive is powerful: "...they deserve any support we can give them" because they are "companions in spreading the Truth" (3 John 8).

The Perfect Church Myth: Why Church Hopping Fails the Faith

If you interview church people, it's not very long before you will run into a church hopper. The profile is something like this: They have been at the present church for two years. Before that, they were at the church down the road for two and a half years. Before that, they were at the church across town for eighteen months. These Christians are on a lifelong quest to find the perfect church. You should tell them, "If you find a perfect church, don't join it—you'll ruin it."

Every church has challenges. Sometimes the problems people perceive are not difficulties at all. It's just that they disagree with something at the church. It's not really a church issue, it's *theirs*.

Occasionally, churches become divided by conflicting strategies. The real issue is that they are stuck in binary thinking. They believe everything is either/or. They don't have the capacity to think both/and.

When people rehearse problems in the church, there is often a conversation about a misbehaving pastor. There is a wide range of bad behavior among church leaders. A pastor may be under stress and say something inappropriate in anger. At the other extreme, a pastor could go to prison for embezzlement. People leave the church because pastors sin. The fundamental misconception is that pastors are supposed to be sin/less. There are always some church members who leave the church when

pastors misbehave. Few people, however, focus on restoration for the pastors and treat them as if they are real people, like everybody else.

There are many Christians who leave their church because they listened to—and believed—gossip. In almost every instance, they have also failed to follow Jesus' direction in Matthew 18, to gently correct the gossip by going and confronting the people who are the source.

The worst-case scenario is when people see challenges at church and bail from God altogether. They discover that Christians aren't perfect. They missed the whole centerpiece of what it means to be Church: the cross of Jesus and forgiveness. They also miss seeing the "log" in their own eye.

In 1 Peter 4:12-19, the apostle says, "Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job." When people give up on their church, in some way they often blame God. They have the Bible's description of Church confused. It is a hospital for sinners, not a country club of perfection.

Many believe that doing church should never be challenging. Peter addresses this, too. He says, "...be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced." He continues, "If you're abused because of Christ, count yourself fortunate" (1 Peter 4:12-14).

Whether it's the turmoil and tensions of everyday church life or persecution from the outside, the response is not to bail out of your church.

In verse 13, Peter clarifies: All these challenges are part of church life. He says, "This is a spiritual refining process...." Yet,

it isn't—if you don't face it from the biblical perspective. You just hop to the next church or bail from the faith altogether. In verse 19, Peter writes, “So if you find life difficult because you're doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what He's doing, and He'll keep on doing it.” The good news? Jesus never church hops!

Conclusion:

A Church That Lives Differently

Throughout this study, you have explored what it truly means to *be Church* rather than simply *do church*. Scripture has shown us again and again that God never designed His people to be an institution that manages programs. He called us to be a movement shaped by grace, grounded in identity, and lived through everyday relationships that point people to Jesus.

Being Church begins with belonging to Christ. It continues as we believe His truth and become the kind of people whose lives reflect His Kingdom. The early church embraced this with stunning clarity. They disciplined others as they went. They made faith central. They lived differently in a corrupt culture. They valued authenticity over activity. They carried the DNA of the Kingdom in their attitudes and relationships. They did not wait for programs or structures. They created new opportunities through Spirit-led imagination.

The final entry reminds us that it is easy to drift. Israel drifted. The early church drifted. Churches today drift. When our energy is spent maintaining calendars, running projects, or preserving traditions, we lose sight of God's one great assignment. Jesus gave His people a mission: Make disciples who make disciples. Everything else supports that mission. Nothing replaces it.

This is why the call to be Church is deeply entrepreneurial. Movements require creativity. Discipling requires initiative.

Reaching people in a changing culture requires courage and new experiments. You are invited to think like a missionary, see your relationships as your mission field, and imagine new ways to embody the hope of Jesus right where you live.

Healthy churches are built day by day as ordinary believers live with extraordinary intentionality. God does not need more committees. He needs more courage. He does not need more programs. He needs more people willing to step into the world with the love and power of Christ.

You are called to help move the movement. As you go, make disciples. As you live, reflect grace. As you lead, think creatively. As you encounter needs, respond with Kingdom imagination. This is what it means to truly be the Church in a culture hungry for hope and truth.

Questions for Discussion

Where have you seen the difference between *doing church* and *being Church* in your own life or congregation? What practical steps could help you shift toward a lifestyle of disciple-making?

If you viewed your neighborhood, workplace, or relationships as your primary mission field, what new opportunities for connection or discipleship become visible?

What activities, programs, or expectations tend to drain energy away from relational disciple-making? What could your group or church release or simplify?

Which Kingdom values stood out to you most in this study (grace, authenticity, hope, belief, belonging, multiplication, etc.)? How could those values shape new habits or rhythms in your weekly life?

Where do you notice the temptation to focus on tasks, programs, or maintenance more than people? What would it look like to redirect that effort creatively toward mission?

If you could design one simple, low-risk, relational experiment to reach someone who does not yet know Jesus, what would you try this week?

Movements multiply when ordinary people take small intentional steps. What is one practical next step you feel led to take as a disciple who makes disciples?



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①

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③

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②

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④

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About the Authors



Dr. Kent R. Hunter is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries. He believes that God has called him to help Christians and their churches become more effective for the Great Commission, to reach unbelievers and to make them disciples of Jesus Christ. Dr. Hunter is the author of more than 40 books. He has consulted more than 1,800 churches from 80 denominations, as well as nondenominational and independent churches. He developed the SEND Movement, which trains congregational members to become missionaries to those who are unchurched in their social networks. Kent writes the bimonthly Church Doctor Report, found on www.churchdoctor.org. Kent lives on a tree farm in northeast Indiana with his wife, Janet. Kent and Janet have two grown children, Laura and Jon.



Dr. Tracee J. Swank leads Church Doctor Ministries. She is a certified church consultant, Christian leadership coach, StoryBrand Guide, and Business Made Simple Coach. She works with pastors, ministry leaders, and Christian entrepreneurs to help them fulfill their God-given vision and mission in the Kingdom. Tracee holds a master's degree in theological studies and a Doctor of Ministry in Kingdom entrepreneurship. She enjoys speaking at conferences, leading ministry immersion trips, and mentoring leaders in creative, Kingdom-focused projects. When not traveling for ministry, she resides in northwest Ohio with her husband, Matt, and their black Lab, Beckett. She enjoys gardening, cooking, and cheering for Ohio State University. (Go Bucks!)