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Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

C U L T U R E

KENT R. HUNTER
with **TOM SCHAEFFER**

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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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The Culture of God's Kingdom

Introduction

Jesus often began His teaching with the words, “The Kingdom of God is like....” As you read through the New Testament, it’s hard to miss the transformational power of faith. In fact, Jesus describes it as being “born again.” Baptism is a spiritual rebirth. Christian faith fundamentally redesigns who we are and who we become. We are “Christians”—spiritual offsprings of Jesus Christ.

Christian culture is unique, even in the world of religions. Faith in Jesus is not just another form of religious culture. It is a supernatural life change with eternal impact. This cultural change is described as a rebirth. Those who follow Christ are “born again.” It is a new lease on life, a radical rearrangement with eternal ramifications.

With spiritual rebirth in this eternal dimension, we enter a spiritual and cultural war. It begins in a holy instant yet reflects a lifelong process of spiritual growth. This process is divinely designed to shape our values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews. It is not simply head knowledge. Just because you can find the Book of Proverbs without checking the table of contents in your Bible doesn’t mean you’ve arrived as a biblical scholar who knows it all.

The culture of the Kingdom is a lifelong journey, without graduation—until you join Jesus in eternity. One of Jesus’ most respected phrases is, “The Kingdom of God is like....” And He

said it a lot. It is clear that our journey to Kingdom culture is a lifelong effort toward reenculturation. When Jesus said, “You must be born again,” He emphasized the transformational impact of the unique journey into the culture of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom culture journey, according to the Apostle Paul, is a lifelong experience that is aimed at the “renewal of your mind.” It changes everything—the way you think, the way you live, the way you act, and the way you respond to every aspect of life. You become a citizen of the Kingdom.

Perhaps we should be more “extravagant” in our spiritual behavior with others. That would make us “missionaries.” It would define us as those who are sold out to Jesus. It would reflect our generous giving. It would establish our unwavering outreach to others. It would describe our commitment to worship. It will reflect our passion for outreach, telling others about our experience of faith in Jesus.

We need a heavy dose of Kingdom culture. Why? Sometimes we have to see things differently before we can do things differently. We need Kingdom culture.

Living Transformed: Overcoming Cultural Drift with Kingdom Values

One of the most powerful statements about everyday Christian life in a worldly world is Paul's words at the beginning of Romans 12. Paul faces the reality that believers—and whole congregations, even denominations and networks of churches—live in a constant and continual culture war.

There is Christian culture, also described as Kingdom culture, taught by Jesus every time He said, “The Kingdom of God is like this....” On the other hand, there is our everyday environment of worldly culture. Some of this world is in sync with Kingdom culture. Much of it is not. This is the tension, an environment in which churches, church leaders, and church members live—every minute of every day.

We are bombarded by worldly values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews. Many of these elements are in direct contrast to Kingdom culture. This is the daily battle we face. Paul says, in essence, “Don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind—which is an act of God.” How will God transform us?

You can, and should, pray for a greater renewal of your mind every day. But there's much more. It's why the Scripture—the Bible—is so important.

Admittedly, it's not a short study. It takes commitment. It takes daily practice. It's a lifelong journey. Yet, our research shows most Christians don't read the Bible regularly—fewer than 50 percent read it on a regular basis. Many Christians, 49 percent, do not participate in a regular group Bible study.

Many Christians are stuck in an old version of the Bible. If you ask a missionary which version of the Bible is their favorite, they will say, "The next one." Why? Because language constantly changes. If you asked someone 50 years ago, "What is a cell phone?" they would probably answer, "a phone they give to people in jail." Yeah, language changes!

As I write this, *The Message* version seems most engaging. According to the brilliant translator Eugene Peterson, it's not meant to be a scholarly study Bible. It's written to be a life-learning, engaging Bible. It will be out-of-date someday. I love *The Message*, at this moment, because it helps me to appropriate God's teaching to my everyday life. And though I have read, cover to cover, several translations over the years, I know—if I live long enough—there will be another one coming. In this changing world, language changes. Don't make a version of the Bible an idol. It's a tool. The content—the meaning—never changes. But if you don't update the words, it *does* change the meaning—to something difficult to comprehend and apply to your life. God's plan is to effectively change your life through the divine power of His Word.

So, back to the opening sentences of Romans 12. Let's unpack them from *The Message* (for now). The key launching thought is this: "Don't be conformed to this world, but let God transform you." Here's how *The Message* communicates that: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and

walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.” Yeah, that’s complete transformation!

The next part acknowledges the real struggle Christians and their churches face every minute of every day: “Embracing what God does for you....” This is God’s action, not yours, not mine. It starts with God—or we define ourselves as God. We don’t want to do that! Not a good idea!

Paul continues: “Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.” How does that work out? Paul continues, “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking.” (This is about a renewal of your mind: how you think). “Instead,” Paul says, “fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he (God) wants from you, and quickly respond to it.”

This is one of the greatest descriptive issues—the issue behind the issue in most churches and with many Christians: Christians who don’t know the complete will of God, what God wants, because they don’t know—or don’t want to know—what God says in Scripture. Then Paul lays out the bottom line: “Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Wow! It’s all about God! It’s all about spiritual growth. It’s all about doing what God wants. It’s all about spiritual maturity. It is the greatest need for Christians and churches. It is the greatest and most important challenge you and I face.

Strength in Spirit: Transforming Churches Through Discipleship

Being “church” is both an identity and a calling. You *are* church and *do* church. The church has a “business,” but it’s not about “busyness.”

There is confusion, however, about *how* we impact the world around us for Jesus Christ—our mission and purpose.

We confess and act two different ways. We say it’s Jesus who grows His Kingdom. But we work like we grow the Kingdom. In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul clarifies. He says, “I ask him [God the Father] to strengthen you by his Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength.”

Churches wear people out with programs and activities. Yet, from the perspective of God’s Kingdom, it’s first and foremost about who you are and who you become. After all, God made us as human *beings*, not human *doings*.

This is often difficult to grasp. We’re usually so caught up in church “programs” that we neglect our personal growth. Yet, as we grow, we come to know God. As we increasingly know God, we more effectively make Him known to others.

To reduce Jesus’ mission to “doing stuff” at the expense of growing people in faith is a surefire approach to failure. Jesus “made” disciples. He commanded us to “make disciples.”

Paul clarifies in verses 20-21, “God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.”

It is counterintuitive for most Christians to believe that if you focused on growing Christians *spiritually*, your church would grow *explosively*. Yet, it works. It’s called “making disciples” who become disciplers. It’s all about who you are and who you become. It’s all about multiplication!

Breaking Through Cultural Clutter: The Kingdom of God and Its Renewal

The Book of Acts comes to a close with Paul in Rome under house arrest but living in a rented home with a guard. He first invited the Jewish leaders to hear about the Kingdom of God. They listened and were divided. Their focus became distracted as they started bickering with each other. They were so steeped in their culture that they missed the Messiah and His Kingdom culture. Paul, quoting Isaiah, made it clear: “You listen, but don’t hear. You look, but don’t see” (Acts 28:26, paraphrased). Their focus was skewed by their worldview, embedded in the culture of religion, so deep they missed the faith represented in the Messiah they had been seeking.

So, Paul turned his attention to the non-Jewish people, the Gentiles. Yet, the apostle never lost focus. As Acts comes to a close, what is Paul doing? “He urgently presented all matters of the kingdom of God. He explained everything about Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:30-31).

The greatest roadblock to the renewal of personal faith—and the local church—is the “religious” culture. It’s easier to reach non-Christians who don’t have cultural clutter.

It is harsh to say, but nevertheless true: “It is easier to give birth than to raise the dead.” Not at all impossible for our God of the resurrection. Just harder.

Transformational Change: The Battle for Renewal in the Church

Many church leaders are hyper-focused on *doing* rather than *being*. They jump at the next newest program or activity and wonder why—when all is said and done—a lot is said and not much is done. The church is essentially the same as when they started. The essence of the church has not changed at all.

This is true for effective outreach. Many churches operate at a low level of mission effectiveness. In biblical terms, there is little spiritual fruit. Some churches may appear busy, but there is little evidence of making new disciples—bringing in the harvest, reaching those who are not yet Christians. What happens? Christians just work harder, burning out staff and members alike.

1 Peter 4:1 says, “Since Jesus went through everything you’re going through and more, learn to think like Him.” This is the “renewal” of the *mind* the Apostle Paul wrote about to the Christians at Rome (Romans 12:1-2). This is the essence of Jesus’ teaching that began, “The Kingdom of God is like....”

The battle for revitalization does not take place in a board or staff meeting, in a program, or in an activity. The battle for revitalization takes place in the geography of your mind. Sometimes we have to see things differently before we can do things differently.

We need the culture of the Kingdom. Then we experience a renewal of our mind. This results in transformational change. This is the essence of the Christian movement.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to embody Kingdom culture in a world—and often, in a church—shaped by worldly culture?

Reflect on how Paul challenges believers in Romans, Ephesians, and Acts to resist cultural conformity and embrace transformation. How can we discern when our church is shaped more by tradition or busyness than by Christ?

How does true spiritual renewal begin with a change of mindset rather than more activity?

Explore how “renewal of the mind” (Romans 12:2, 1 Peter 4:1) is essential for revitalization. What assumptions or habits need to shift in your life or congregation to experience lasting transformation?

Are we making disciples or just managing programs?

Consider how churches often confuse “doing” with spiritual effectiveness. How can your church prioritize deep discipleship that multiplies rather than simply maintains?

It’s time to move from cultural conformity to Kingdom clarity. The Church is not called to mimic the world’s patterns or cling to empty traditions—but to be transformed from the inside out.

This week, begin with your mind. Ask God to renew your perspective, reveal areas of stagnation, and stir a fresh hunger for His Word. Let go of busyness that distracts from your true identity in Christ. Choose one step that shifts your focus from “doing” to “becoming”—join a discipleship group, simplify a ministry overloaded with activity, or have a hard conversation about your church’s culture. Kingdom culture starts with us. Will you live it? Will you lead it?

Traditions of Faith

Hurtful or Positive?

It's an interesting question. Are "Christian traditions" helpful or hurtful? In truth, some traditions of faith are vehicles that promote healthy Christianity, while others actually cause damage to the health and vitality of the Christian faith.

So, how do you sort out the good from the harmful? Perhaps the best approach is to identify the difference between *tradition* and *traditionalism*. Tradition is the living faith of the dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Jesus ran into the Pharisees on several occasions. They had followed hundreds of spiritual practices for centuries. Their hard hearts were focused on "the way we've always done it." Their bias for religion was so strong, most of them missed a relationship with God's Savior when Jesus appeared right before their eyes. Saul was one of them. Early on, he persecuted Christians who had been set on fire—spiritually—by Jesus Himself. Saul was a spiritually blinded Pharisee—until he wasn't. On the road to Damascus, he was changed from a traditionalist to a believer in the spiritual sense.

Where you live, are there still some churches that have bell towers? In history, particularly in Europe, ringing those bells would be the announcement declaring it was time for worship. It was a form of tradition in the world before clocks, watches, and cell phones. Yet, many churches built in the last century have built towers. The original purpose had become irrelevant. The same traditionalism accounts for those churches with

pews, hymnals, and stained glass windows. All of these served a purpose that no longer exists. They represented meaningful purposes in the past (traditions) and now are obsolete issues of traditionalism.

When it comes to church, God's Word never changes. That is a spiritual tradition. Those obsolete delivery systems that reflect faith in objects? They become hindrances and roadblocks to the effectiveness of God's mission in Jesus Christ. If we can't overcome the roadblocks, we underappreciate what Jesus did: He came in human likeness to make a point. A relationship with Him is most important. The delivery systems change with every generation.

From Tradition to Transformation: Presenting a Timeless Jesus

When God came to earth in the form of His Son, He didn't look like Moses or Billy Graham. He looked like the people He came to reach, like the people where He landed.

Being God, He could have looked like anything He wanted. It wasn't because He was a spy and wanted to "blend in." He was the Savior who didn't want people to have to jump through hoops and loops to encounter Him and absorb His message.

The word for this strategy is "indigenous." In short: Be real. It's the strategy that works best.

Yet, because the world—in every culture—continues to change, followers of Jesus need to work at being "indigenous." That is, fit the culture of every group. The message never changes. But everything else must constantly be massaged and nuanced to fit the people you are reaching.

There is an Enemy we must deal with, and he is subtle in his disruptive approaches. In Galatians 1:13-16, Paul recounts his old self: "persecuting God's church." Then he provides insight about his real issues: "I was so enthusiastic about the traditions of my ancestors...." True and real "tradition" is *the living faith of the dead*. Hebrews 11 is the hall of fame for those who trusted God and got it right.

You may be one of those who changed from a lapsed church member to an active believer, evangelist, and champion for Jesus. Your ancestors will remember your spiritual change. That is *tradition*: the living faith of the dead.

Traditionalism is what Paul had before he met Jesus. It is the dead faith of the living. It is faith in things “the way we’ve always done it.”

This is the Enemy’s trap: Get comfortable with the containers of faith, slip into *religion*, drift from *faith*, and keep styles that subconsciously communicate that Jesus is old and out-of-date. It is an assault on the incarnation. Jesus was *real* to those He met. When we present Jesus as out-of-date, it roadblocks His mission.

Who says “Thy” anymore? Where do you see buildings built to look like sixteenth century Europe? Who sits in pews or sings material with words no one knows anymore? Who dresses like church leaders of 500 years ago? Who does that? The answer: traditionalists! When we present Jesus as an out-of-date foreigner from ancient history, we block unbelievers from the power of salvation. Sometimes we Christians can be so “heavenly” minded we are no earthly good!

If we do that, we corrupt the incarnation of God and promote religion mixed with faith. We contribute to mission impotence. We don’t really want to communicate that our God is old and out-of-date. That would be spiritually criminal! Jesus is alive. And, if He visited us in the flesh, He would look like one of us, speak our language, eat our food—and impact our lives.

Principles That Endure: Keeping the Message Above the Method

The word “conservative” often takes a bumpy ride in the Christian church. Sometimes “conservative” goes off the path of truth and crashes into the ditch of “customs.” It’s odd—and sad—how Christians and churches get in a wreck because “we’ve always done it that way.”

This happened on a major scale in the early church. Among Jews, circumcision of young males was a must, whether you were a practicing Jew or not. However, when non-Jews became receptive to the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, there were many full-grown men who were not Jews—and not circumcised. Given the level of medical care—or the lack of!—in those days, an adult non-Jew who became a Christian faced a scary and painful entry into the faith.

Then Peter had a dream from God and recognized the great difference between principles and customs or methods. Yet, the challenge didn’t go away.

When customs creep into the realm of the sacred, even the best of Christians can get mired in the muck of confusion. When circumcision becomes a roadblock for men to become Christ-followers, it is an issue with eternal consequences.

In Galatians 2:1-14, Paul writes about his first trip to Jerusalem to confer with the heavyweights of the movement: James,

Peter, and John. These leaders gave recognition to Paul's ministry—along with Barnabas and Titus—to the non-Jews.

At a later time, Paul reports, Peter visited Antioch. Peter fellowshiped with the non-Jewish Christians. Many of the people wanted to follow Jesus. Yet, circumcision was a hurdle—a roadblock to the movement. The Scripture clarifies that circumcision was not a custom that should hinder Gentile men from following Jesus Christ.

It's great to be conservative about scriptural truth. Yet, it's dangerous to "baptize" methods—traditions—and make them sacred and eternal.

Think of biblical truth as principles. "Methods are many, but principles are few. Methods always change, but principles never do." If you want a productive mission to non-Christians, you need to get that right!

Faith That Moves: From Rituals to Relevance in the Modern Church

Many churches experience biblical drift when it comes to traditional *practices*. The result of perpetuating worn-out approaches makes God “old,” “out-of-date,” and “irrelevant” in the eyes of those who are not yet believers.

The use of ancient architecture, word forms, dress codes, and music from another era can also make God appear as foreign to unbelievers. These issues are outside their experience and provide another barrier for them to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ unhindered.

Using worn-out habits that do not communicate becomes a “feel-good” practice for lifelong Christians who would love to return to the “good old days.” However, it is a major contribution to the inability of many churches to effectively reach those who do not yet know Christ.

The confusion is between the *style* and *substance* of the Christian faith. Style can, should, and must change. Substance must never change. Churches that struggle to reach new people for Christ are usually out of sync in substance or style.

To continue updating style is an approach to keep your church from becoming irrelevant. Changing the substance also causes your church to become irreverent—and impotent for outreach.

The Pharisees tangled with Jesus—the God who came in the flesh, demonstrating that He did not want any style to get in the way of the message. Jesus didn't just teach the message. Jesus was, and is, the message. You and your church don't just share the message. You *are* the message. The question is, “Are you a relevant, impactful message to those who don't yet know Jesus?”

The Pharisees were into the rules big time. They would wear hoods out in public so that if they saw a pretty woman, they would put the hoods over their faces. That way they wouldn't be tempted. Of course, they frequently ran into walls, donkeys, and other people. They looked like idiots!

Many churches today are covered in the hood of worn-out, irrelevant, old-school language and styles. This soothes the believers at the expense of reaching unbelievers—those Jesus gave His life to save.

Tradition and traditionalism are confused by many well-meaning Christians. Tradition is the faith of the dead. Are you an enthusiastic Christian? When a new translation of the Bible is published, are you eager to read it? Do you know someone who is no longer living, yet you clearly remember their enthusiastic faith? That is a living faith of the dead. That is *tradition*.

Traditionalism is a dead faith of the living. Rather than faith in the living Jesus, some slip into a faith in the rituals—rituals so strong they rule behavior and wreck mission potential. This is a major challenge to lifelong Christians and a major roadblock to effective outreach.

The Pharisees were masters at roadblocking God's new covenant in Jesus—and the mission of the early church. In

Matthew 15:1-20, the Pharisees were all over Jesus because He and His disciples ate without washing their hands. You'd like to think they were driven by sanitary practices, but their real issue was breaking the rules—the religious habits. Jesus responded to their challenge: "...why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (verse 3, NIV).

Jesus continued to unpack the rules they invented to circumvent God's command with ungodly behavior. He reminded them of the command to "honor your father and mother" (verse 4, NIV). Without nursing homes in that day, people were required to take their elderly parents into their homes and care for them. Some of the people of God didn't do a good job of that. They would let their parents suffer to save money. The Pharisees knew this was a sin against the commandment to "honor your father and mother." But instead of holding people accountable, the Pharisees made up another rule. They said that if the money people saved from not caring for their parents was given to the temple as an offering (which went to the Pharisees), that made neglect of their parents excusable!

The Pharisees created a "hedge around the law." The Hebrew word for this was *corban*. Filled with customs, habits, styles, rules and regulations, these hedges started out to be good and helpful—until they became standards by which to judge others and sneak around real faith issues. This is where Jesus took them to task. Judging the faith of others or providing roadblocks to the mission were approaches rejected by our Lord. The wrong use of human tradition, called traditionalism, was the approach of the Pharisees, not of Jesus or His disciples.

Nevertheless, today, many Christians, interested in reaching the lost, are ineffective because of the focus on traditionalism.

They bury their heads in the hoods of traditionalism and run into walls that distract them from fulfilling the Great Commission. Sadly, so many churches do so much well, yet wonder why they do not reach people in large numbers and see the Kingdom grow like it did in the New Testament. Often, it is because the hoods of traditionalism have covered their eyes to the approach of reaching people in a relevant and meaningful way.

Confident Faith: Breaking Free from Religious Roadblocks

Tradition can be good and helpful and destructive. In each generation, God's people must refresh the faith to assure the believers are not distracted by worn-out containers. Nowhere is this more important than with spiritual language.

Spiritual language can become a religious roadblock with the passing of one generation. It occurs when the containers—words—no longer reflect the meaning. Language is alive and constantly changing. The fact that Jesus showed up in the flesh indicates the extreme measure that God takes so that we get the point.

In 2 Corinthians 1:20-22 Paul says, “Whatever God has promised gets stamped with the Yes of Jesus.” The word *yes* is most often used among Christians—but using an old form: *amen*.

Yet, if you ask many Christians, they have no clue what that word means. It is a religious container, but no longer a faith container. Most people, if they guess, would think “amen” means “the end.”

What Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 1:20-22 is this: Christians can have “confidence” in their belief. “Confidence” is a word that comes from two Latin words, *con* that means “with” and *fidem* that means “faith.”

Many Christians are sure (“confident”) about God’s gift of eternal life but add: “I hope so.” That’s not confidence! They have missed God’s “yes” in Jesus. Paul says in these same verses, “In him, this is what we preach and pray, the great Amen, God’s Yes and our Yes together, gloriously evident. God affirms us, making us a sure thing in Christ, putting his Yes within us” (2 Corinthians 1:20-22). It is a sure beginning of what He has destined to complete.

Whenever there is a new translation of the Bible, there are always detractors. The same is true of new forms of worship, dress codes, even the way churches shape their buildings. These *containers* are religious, not spiritual. When they work, use them. When they no longer work, change them—so the meaning gets through! When God chose to show up in the “incarnation,” the root words of that mean, literally, “in meat.” (Ever eat chili *con carne*—*with meat*?)

Jesus in the flesh is God’s great demonstration—God’s great amen—God’s great yes—that He cares so much more about living faith—not about rote religion. Many churches perpetuate “feel-good” words like “Thy,” “Thou,” “amen,” and “hallelujah.” Research among Christians demonstrates that many don’t know what they mean. That is the bad side of religion!

The real tragedy is that God’s people take the relevant, incarnate faith in Jesus and make it old, out-of-date, confusing, and irrelevant to unbelievers and believers alike. It is the polar opposite of everything God does in Jesus Christ. And it makes the faith impotent to reach the lost. How selfish! Yes!

Discussion Questions

Are we confusing the containers of faith with the content of the Gospel?

Jesus came in a form that people could understand—indigenous, accessible, real. How have we, like Paul before his conversion, allowed customs or “the way we’ve always done it” to become barriers instead of bridges? What parts of our church culture may be comforting us while keeping others out?

What future is God inviting us to see—and prepare for?

Reflect on how transitional moments in Scripture (like Moses to Joshua or Saul to Paul) required prophetic vision and patient leadership. What is God showing you about the next chapter for your church? How are you preparing for it?

Are we clinging to tradition or carrying on true faith?

Consider how tradition can be the living faith of the dead, while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Which way is your church leaning? How can you honor the past without being imprisoned by it?

The Church is not a museum of sacred customs—it is a movement of Spirit-filled people bearing the Good News in real time. This week, ask God to show you where your life and church need to be more indigenous—more present, more relevant, more faithful to the mission. Begin with humility: What container needs to be laid down so the message of Christ can rise up? Where do you need to lead with patience—and where do you need to speak with prophetic boldness? Choose one tangible step to embody a living faith: Revisit a ministry for clarity of mission, listen more deeply to your community, or share your story of transformation. Renewal isn't optional—it's essential. Will you wait for it, or will you walk in it?

Conclusion

What's Next?

Living the Culture of the Kingdom

At some point, every journey of reflection must turn to the road ahead. The question we now face is not “What have we learned?” but “What will we do with what we’ve learned?” If we have heard the Spirit speaking in these pages, then the only faithful response is transformation.

The call is not simply to understand Kingdom culture—but to embody it.

This final chapter is about next steps. Not a checklist of things to do, but a mindset to adopt, a rhythm of life to embrace. It’s about becoming the kind of people—and the kind of church—that reflects the Kingdom of God in a culture increasingly resistant to it. It is also about becoming the kind of Church that remembers its tradition without being ruled by traditionalism, that practices discernment in transition, and that leads not for the sake of maintenance but for the sake of mission.

1. Let the Renewal Begin in You

Romans 12 urges us not to conform but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Before any structural or strategic changes, the first shift is internal. Church revitalization begins not in the boardroom but in the soul.

Ask yourself: Where is my mind still shaped by this world rather than the Word? Begin there. Invite God to renew your

imagination, your assumptions, and even your habits. The battle for Kingdom culture is won or lost in the geography of the heart.

2. Shift from Doing to Being

We are not human doings—we are human beings. Yet, so often, churches fall into the trap of measuring faithfulness by activity. Busy calendars and full programs can sometimes distract us from the deeper work of discipleship.

Now is the time to ask: Are we making disciples—or just managing ministries?

Discipleship is slow. It's relational. It's often messy. But it's the one thing Jesus told us to do. Let your church become known less for its events and more for its transformation stories.

3. Build a Culture, Not Just a Congregation

Culture is more than what we do; it's how we think, speak, and relate. The Kingdom of God is not a program—it's a way of life. When Kingdom culture takes root, it changes how we treat each other, how we speak truth, how we forgive, how we serve, and how we worship.

It is possible to have a growing church and still miss the Kingdom if our inner culture remains unchanged. But when Kingdom culture leads, even small churches become mighty outposts of heaven.

4. Lead with Discernment, Not Just Direction

In seasons of transition, it is tempting to rush decisions, seek quick fixes, or return to familiar habits. But lasting transformation flows from spiritual discernment. Leaders must

listen more than they strategize and shepherd more than they steer.

Discernment means helping a congregation recognize where God is already at work and joining Him there. It means naming fears without being ruled by them. It means moving forward with trust rather than urgency.

Ask: Am I making space for God's voice in this process? Am I equipping others to hear it, too?

5. Expect Resistance—and Respond with Grace

Culture change, even when rooted in Scripture and soaked in prayer, will meet resistance. Some will long for the “old ways.” Some will feel anxious, even angry. That's OK.

Remember, Paul faced this. Jesus faced this. Transformation is not always embraced—it is often born through tension. But if our posture is love, humility, and steady faith, that resistance becomes the soil in which grace takes root.

6. Stay Rooted in the Word, Fueled by the Spirit

There is no shortcut. No five-step model. Only this: Stay in the Word and dependent on the Spirit.

Scripture is not just a textbook—it's a tuning fork. It aligns our lives with the frequency of the Kingdom. And the Holy Spirit is not just a motivator, but the very breath of the Church. If this movement is not soaked in prayer and led by the Spirit, it will not last.

Final Challenge: Embody the Kingdom

This is not the end of the story. This is your turning point.

You've studied the tension between worldly culture and Kingdom culture. You've examined the ways tradition can either bless or blind us. You've seen how discernment shapes wise leadership in seasons of change. And you've glimpsed the power of transformation when Christ renews the mind, reshapes the heart, and redirects the mission.

So now, we ask: Will you live it? Will you lead it?

Let your life, your ministry, your church become a living answer to that question. The Kingdom is near. The culture is watching. And the time is now.

Let's go.



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isn't growing?

Is it starting to feel
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Here's how it works

①

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What is working? What is not?
What is God's vision
for your church?

③

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We guide you in creating an
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and achieve your goals.

②

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④

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CONSULTING & COACHING

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True transformational change is a spiritual process. This unique transformational adventure uses our most effective tools, resources, and teachings along with a team of committed consultants and coaches to come alongside you as your guide. Members, leaders, staff, and ministry will experience spiritual change and growth to help your church reach more people for Christ in the 21st century.

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This is a thorough analysis of your congregation's health, strength, and challenges. Recommendations for more effective ministry are shared to help you achieve more for God's purpose. A report is generated that graphically illustrates the church's views, attitudes, and worldviews. These become the mechanisms to develop a strategic plan for recommendations to move your church to action.

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Our coaching approach is simple: We help Christian leaders unleash the capacity to realize their God-inspired best in ministry. Our process is based on asset mapping, leveraging your strengths, creating disciplined action plans, and building momentum through accountability and follow-up to help you achieve success.

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This is transition coaching for retiring ministers, staff members, and churches transitioning toward new leadership. Your Church Doctor will help to develop a plan of succession that works. They will help you develop a transition plan philosophy of ministry document; will structure a timetable that honors the retiring staff, assimilates the successor, and serves your church; and will help you avoid transitional pitfalls.

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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.



Tom Schaeffer has over 30 years of experience in ministry. During that time, he has led churches through transitions ranging from the mission start of a new congregation to the mission redevelopment of a failing congregation to the launch of a satellite worship at a large congregation. He has served in rural, urban, and suburban contexts. In addition, Tom started an award-winning brewery that, during his leadership, supported his ministry and worked under the motto of “Brew good. Do good.” Tom has served as a coach for numerous pastors and ministers. Currently, Tom serves as pastor of Faith United Lutheran Church in Toledo, Ohio, a new congregation resulting from the merging of three prior congregations.