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Focus On Mission:
Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

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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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Introduction

Do you “go” to church? Do you invite others to “come” to church? Is that the only posture of your church that is used to reach those who are unchurched in your community?

In the Old Testament, the movement of God-followers was centripetal. The approach was: “Come to the temple and worship God.” Then Jesus appeared on the scene, as God predicted. He said, “Come unto me.” Then he added: “Go, make disciples.”

One of my favorite names for a church is one called “*Come 2 Go*.” What a great name! If you made up nicknames for some churches, they might be, “Come to learn,” “Come to grow,” or “Come to worship.” These descriptions would be accurate, yet incomplete.

Outreach is a priority in Scripture. How does your church reach out to those who don’t yet know Jesus? Most congregations have a sign out front and a website. Some have an evangelism team or outreach program comprised of those who are willing to knock on doors and talk to strangers—inviting them to worship. “Outreach”—for many—reflects a program of the church. What if it was the lifestyle of every member? Think about it: Joe has a relational network at the YMCA, at his business, and among his neighbors. Multiply his network of people for each person in your church and estimate the number

of people in your *sphere of influence* through relationships. Think about all those who don't know Jesus as their Savior.

What if everyone in your church could hear Jesus say, "Go, make disciples"? Personal outreach has the potential to grow God's Kingdom in a way that would shock most of the members. Personal outreach would transform cities and change the world!

Most churches operate as a disrupted football team where the quarterback has to run, pass, receive, and score every touchdown. They would never win a game. Your church cannot win your community for Jesus with the limited efforts of the staff—or a few people on a "committee."

Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that every Christian has the spiritual gift of *evangelism*. Actually, in most churches, only about 10 percent have that gift. However, everyone has the *calling* to be a witness to their unchurched friends, relatives, neighbors, and those at work or at school. Outreach is not limited to "fanatic believers" or pushy "arm-twisters." Every Christian has a personal story to share. Outreach is simply your personal experience: "This is what Jesus means to me. This is how God has helped me." Outreach is not rocket science. Just share your story about what God has done in your life.

From Launchpad to World: Rediscovering the Great Commission

What is the destination of your church and your life as a Christian? So many churches and Christians see the center of their faith life as “at the church building.”

While Jesus said, “I will build My church,” He wasn’t reflecting about a building as a destination. So, what is your strategy when it comes to unchurched friends, relatives, neighbors, or those with whom you work or go to school? For most Christians, the posture is: “Invite them to church.” However, this is the polar opposite approach from the New Testament church.

The direction of the Christian movement is not to bring people to church, but to take church to people. Jesus said, “Come unto Me.” For some, they translate this to, “Come to church.” Yet, when Jesus gave the Great Commission, it was all about “Go,” make disciples.

The Old Testament was a *centripetal* movement: “Come to the temple,” make your sacrifices. The temple is where you encounter God. But Jesus reversed all that. He visited the temple, but His priority was to be “out there” where you find the people. This was a huge reversal for those Jews who became followers of Jesus. Jesus’ approach is *centrifugal*.

And yet, “mission”—for many believers—is focused around programs and activities at the church building. Honestly? This

approach is not biblical and not that effective. Why would you invite someone to a worship service, where your focus is on the Savior they do not yet believe in?

Many churches make the established religion the “hero” of the story. In the Old Testament, that was appropriate. However, it doesn’t fit the movement Jesus built. His mission is centrifugal: going out, meeting people where they are.

In Hebrews, the writer says that while, in the Old Testament, priests sacrificed animals and brought the blood into the temple, Jesus changed all that. In Hebrews 13:13-15, the writer says, “...let’s go outside, where Jesus is, where the action is....” The Scripture continues, “This ‘insider world’ is not our home.... Let’s take our place outside with Jesus.”

Many churches are plateaued or declining. One major reason is that they make the church building the destination. Change that: Your church is the launchpad. The world is your destination. John 3:16 doesn’t say, “For God so loved the *church* that He gave His only begotten Son.” It says, “For God so loved the *world*.” Turn your church inside out, and God will use you to start a revival!

Beyond the Holy Huddle: Embracing All Who Enter

When I was in my first year of seminary, I was chosen to represent the school at the US Congress on Evangelism hosted by Billy Graham. It was held at a huge auditorium in Minneapolis, and the place was packed.

As Billy Graham came to the podium to speak, a man walked up the middle aisle. He was dressed like he lived on the streets. His hair was long and scraggly—at a time in history when variant dress codes were far less tolerated. I'm embarrassed to admit: I thought to myself, "That guy looks like a bum off the street." Those who served as security for the event must have had a similar judgmental attitude.

Meanwhile, this guy continued walking up the center aisle toward the front, looking for a seat. Since there were none available, he sat on the floor, right in front of the first row. Everyone watched as the security people came up and removed him—accompanied by murmurs throughout the auditorium. It was an unusual scene!

After a few seconds, Billy Graham left the stage and disappeared. "Was he threatened?" I wondered. Several minutes later, Graham and the "intruder" walked down the center aisle, and a security team member provided a chair in the front. Billy Graham returned to his place at the podium, saying: "Jesus welcomes all people. So do we."

Sometimes we welcome people, yet many times we don't. In the many churches we have served, our consultants usually attend all the worship services, incognito. We have learned to act like guests or first-time visitors. We look all around like we have never seen a church before. We act timid, like we don't know what to do. In this process, over the course of several decades, our experience of being welcomed has always been the primarily same—awful!

In the New Testament letter written by James, specifically James 2:1-4, he says, "If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him, and you say to the man in the suit, 'Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!' and either ignore the street person or say, 'Better sit here in the back row,' haven't you segregated God's children and proved that you are judges who can't be trusted?"

Honestly, most churches are warm and welcoming—to each other! In the hallways—before and after church—most people form what might be called "holy huddles" to talk with their friends. What visitor would crawl through their legs and pop up in the middle, just to get some face-to-face human contact? There are many so-called "greeters" who will hand you a bulletin, say absolutely nothing to you, and make no eye contact at all.

What is the real issue? Most Christians do not have the spiritual DNA of a missionary. So, what happens? Christian churches continue to decline! James asks the key question in James 2:8: How does that sync up with "the Royal Rule of the Scriptures: 'Love others as you love yourself'?"

Your Story Matters: Embracing Personal Witnessing

The most effective way to get everyone in worship to simultaneously look at their feet is for the preacher to begin by saying, “Today’s sermon is about evangelism.” While there are those in every church who have the *gift* of evangelism, on average, about 90 percent do not. And the concept terrifies them! Why?

Most believers have a distorted picture of evangelism in their heads. They see wild and hyperexcited Christians knocking on doors, talking to strangers, interrupting their dinners—and getting doors slammed in their faces. If they were honest, many would say that Christians who do evangelism are hyperactive spiritual maniacs.

What most Christians don’t process is that those with the gift of evangelism are like “spiritual obstetricians.” They have a spiritual gift, a divine attribute. Part of that gift is to know when a child (of God) is ready to be born (again).

However, what about the rest of us—the 90 percent? We are not gifted evangelists. Yet, according to Scripture, we are “witnesses.” Truth be told, that term also scares most people. Why? Because most of God’s people have never been equipped to “witness.” That’s sad, because, in Acts 1:8 (NIV), the resurrected Lord says, “You will be my witnesses: in

Jerusalem [your city or town] ... Judea [your region] ... Samaria [to other cultures], and to the ends of the earth.”

This witness concept is a big deal in Scripture, yet not so much among most Christians. In Revelation 12:9-12, it says the Enemy of God is defeated by a two-part strategy. It is like a two-step plan. Part one: “The blood of the Lamb”—Jesus’ death on the cross. We get that! And part two: “The bold word of ... witness”—our testimony. Your testimony is your personal story of your faith. This is not rocket science!

Many Christians are freaked out by that second part because they don’t understand the key elements of this divine/human strategy.

Element #1: Start in your own Jerusalem. Who does that include? They are the unchurched unbelievers in your social network. They are on the directory in your phone. They aren’t strangers. You likely hang out with most of them regularly.

Element #2: Lose the word “testimonies.” Instead, consider them as “your own personal God stories.” Ask yourself this diagnostic question: “What has God done in my life?” Think about that question every day for a month. Like most everyone, you will likely discover that you have hundreds of “God stories.” As you interact with those in your social network, listen for when they share a hurt, challenge, or difficult change in life. Consciously think about your own life. Identify how and why you think God got you through it. Then, unrehearsed, unpolished, share it from your heart. You just became a witness!

Witnessing Through Stories: Unleashing the Power of Personal Testimony

In Matthew 13:10, the disciples had heard enough parables (stories) from Jesus that they arrived at the inevitable question for Him: “Why do you tell stories?” In Matthew 13:12, Jesus answers that question: “That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward a welcome awakening.”

Jesus had explained so much to the disciples that they were beginning to “get it.” He could speak to them directly and teach them. But, for those who were nonbelievers, He told stories (sometimes called parables). This would help them become more receptive. God stories are a big deal!

In John 11:55 and following, the Jewish Passover was about to begin. Crowds were traveling to Jerusalem from all over. Verse 56 says, “There was a lot of talk of him (Jesus) among those standing around in the Temple.” Jesus was the talk of the town!

There is a lesson here: What can we do to increase the chatter about the truths of faith? In Acts 1:8, Jesus calls us to tell stories—our God stories. Nowhere in Scripture does it say everyone should evangelize. It does say there are some people who are evangelists. They should evangelize! They should go out and present the Gospel and push toward conviction and response. They should quote Bible passages. They have a spiritual gift for that. But most Christians are not gifted for evangelism. However, in Acts 1:8, all Christians are called to be

witnesses. We are all eyewitnesses to the miracles of God in our own lives. Anyone who is a Christian for five years has dozens of stories: a story like, “I was sick; I prayed. I believe God healed me.” Or a story like, “I had no direction in life. I met a Christian. She told me about God. I became a follower of Jesus. I prayed to ask Jesus into my heart, and for the first time, I felt like I had a divine plan for my life. It changed my life.”

Someone the other day shared their God story: “We were married three years, we were financially struggling, and we did not know what to do. Finally, out of desperation, we tried going back to church. And somehow, in some way, we made it through. I believe we got through those lean times with God’s help.”

All of these God stories are a great reminder of Jesus’ strategy: the way the Kingdom grows with greatest impact. Somehow, Christians have turned outreach into a top-down lecture. Preaching is fine, but readiness increases when we tell our God stories, when we are witnesses of what God has done in our life.

As we tell our God stories to those who are not yet Christians, they are much like the crowds in Jerusalem at Passover. We can have high anticipations: “Will Jesus show up?” This concept of being a “witness” revolutionizes a church, changing it from an institution to a movement.

Sometimes we fear what people will think if we start talking about God. This was also an element present in that Passover crowd. In John 12:42, it says there were secret believers among the leaders of the Jews. But they were afraid of the Pharisees. “On the other hand, a considerable number from the ranks of the leaders did believe. But because of the Pharisees, they didn’t come out in the open with it. They were afraid of getting

kicked out of the meeting place.” Then in verse 43: “When push came to shove, they cared more for human approval than for God’s glory.”

The key lesson is this: Tell your God story. Don’t make it a speech. Don’t even polish it. Don’t speak from your brain; speak from your heart. Be authentic. Be genuine. Give the credit to God, where it belongs. And simply tell your story of what happened to you. The nonbeliever who listens to you will not argue about what happened to you. There is no argument about what is true. You are simply saying, “This happened to me, as I experienced it.”

Teach a whole church to do this, and you unleash an amazing movement as people share their God stories in their social networks. That is the primary mission field for your congregation: The sum total of all the non-Christians in the social networks of those in your church. When they experience the value of God stories, they become a powerful tool, every day, in every place, to plant seeds for life with God. When that occurs, your church will experience explosive growth. When that happens, among many churches, the nation experiences revival.

Lost in Mission: Rediscovering Jesus' Priority for Outreach

While thoroughly analyzing almost two thousand churches from eighty denominations, as well as independent and nondenominational congregations—in the US and Canada—we have discovered an interesting consistency about the priority to reach lost people.

This priority is a big deal in the New Testament. Jesus said He has “come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10 NIV). In His marching orders, given to His followers, Jesus said, “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19 NIV). And in His last words before His ascension, Jesus saved the best for last: “You will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NIV).

Based on the work of the apostles, it seems that local outreach was a core priority for the early followers of the Master. In fact, in 2 Peter 3:8-9, the apostle responds to what must have been a common question in the young churches. It appears that Christians were eager to see Jesus return as He had promised to do. Peter responds, “God isn’t late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn’t want anyone lost.”

So, how does this outreach priority get measured in churches—among God’s people? A “priority” is that which you will always do first. How is it measured?

When it comes to *outreach* to the lost, there are several indicators. (1) How often is it the topic of discussion? What is the prominence of outreach to the lost, as mentioned in preaching messages? In church literature? In group discussions? Among leaders? (2) Another measure of priority is financial investment. What part of the budget is directed toward reaching the lost, not just in “foreign missions,” but locally? (3) The third measure is reflected in time and effort. How many people are equipped to reach unchurched people in their own social networks? How often do they do it? Do their lives reflect that they are “witnesses”? (4) A fourth indicator would be results. How many of the present members of the church would say that they became Christians through the outreach efforts of your congregation?

Analyzed from every angle, the results are clear. In almost 100 percent of the churches, the priority of Jesus—the reason He came, the mission He declared for His followers, the clear, driving force of every church—is almost totally absent. Approximately 99.5 percent of congregations fail to demonstrate this biblical priority of Jesus’ movement. How can this be?

Our theory: At some point in history, in so-called “Christianized” countries, many churches redefined the primary mission field as “over there” somewhere—subconsciously declaring “this place” is *not* a mission field. What occurs? Seminaries and Bible colleges do not train pastors in missiology—the discipline of mission and outreach. The result? Pastors can’t train and equip church members in outreach. The result is that Jesus’ outreach priority is lost. Christianity declines. Churches die. We all lose. The strategic Enemy wins.

Revival in the Storm: Embracing God's Purpose in Tough Times

On the morning news on December 24 one year, there was an interesting report. Since it was the day before Christmas, the newscast was more focused on faith for a change. Reporting on a US poll, the analyst said, “72 percent of Americans believe ‘religion’ is important.” Of course, that refers to any “religion.” There was a responsive remark from one of the commentators: “However, church attendance, year after year, is declining. People are just not attending church like they used to.”

Of course, those of us who spend our lives helping churches have known about this for decades. There is no doubt that the Church, in the last several decades, has been inching its way to extinction in the US, North America in general, and much of Europe. These are hard times.

Paul and the early church also went through some hard times. In 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, he writes, “It looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside.” Yet, as he stated in verse 16, “we’re not giving up.”

Later on, in chapter 5, he mixes metaphors about how our human bodies get older and slow down, and then he implies that churches, the body of Christ, can do the same. He refers to the urgency of reaching people for Christ—before it’s too late for them.

While the Christian movement wanes in some parts of the world, it is spreading like wildfire in other parts. What occurs when Christianity is effective? Some of it has to do with the complex realities that make non-Christians receptive. But most of it falls in the laps of Christians and their churches. They have drifted from universal principles of mission.

So, the mission becomes “managing church people and wearing them out with activities that do not make disciples, reach people, or disciple them.” The church becomes a spiritual country club.

It’s amazing how God gets our attention through “hard times.” Paul writes, in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, “We’ve been surrounded and battered by troubles ... we’re not sure what to do ... we’ve been spiritually terrorized ... we’ve been thrown down.”

However, in this context, the Apostle Paul says, “We’re not demoralized ... we know that God knows what to do.... God hasn’t left our side ... we haven’t broken.”

When Christians drift from what it means to be the Church, God uses hard times to get our attention. We start taking a hard look at what it means to be God’s people—Church. We recognize the drift. We return to the culture of the Kingdom—King Jesus’ culture. Jesus’ life lives in us.

It’s a refreshment of what it means to *be* Church, rather than spending our energies trying to *do* church.

From Handcuffs to Freedom: Embracing the Mission of Christ

Do you ever feel that the way we “do church” is like being in handcuffs? What happened to the exciting movement you read about in the New Testament from Acts to Revelation?

Sometimes people get in the way of the church—in the way of the Head of the Church, who is Christ. We instead prefer programs, politics, rules, regulations, bylaws, hierarchies of position, traditions, an unwillingness to change strategy, or a willingness to water down biblical content. It feels like the Christian movement is in handcuffs.

In Philippians 1:12-21, one of the movement leaders, Paul, is in jail. So much for his amazing ministry, right? Not really!

Paul took discipling seriously: equipping God’s people for the work of ministry, as he wrote in Ephesians 4. For him, it was all about multiplication. He understood movement. He wasn’t caught in programs.

In Philippians, we find Paul imprisoned. Was the movement squelched, like when you cut off the head of a spider? No way! The Christian movement is not designed like a spider, but like a starfish. You cut off a piece of a starfish, and it grows back. And the piece you cut off becomes another starfish! That’s the miracle of multiplication!

Paul rejoices over his imprisonment. Why? It proves two things about Jesus' spiritual movement. First, God can turn bad into good. Paul was imprisoned, so he was able to share Jesus with the soldiers who ran the jail. Second, once Paul was locked up, ordinary believers started to share Jesus with others even more!

Paul also had a spiritual attitude about life. He could have withdrawn, blamed God, or become depressed by his incarceration. Instead, he was excited to see the faith movement multiply even more.

Meanwhile, some Christians took over the spotlight that used to shine on Paul. Others had poor motives, making themselves look good, grabbing the attention, using bad motives.

What was Paul's response? In Philippians 1:18-19 he says, "I really don't care about their motives.... Christ is proclaimed, so I just cheer them on!"

Paul was all about winning the world for Jesus Christ. As a Christian, are you? Is your church? Are you able to keep the main thing the main thing, no matter what?

From Skepticism to Salvation: Navigating Doubts with Faith

When you want to share the greatest treasure on earth—faith in Christ—you might hit a brick wall with some people. Jesus dying a hideous death on the cross? It sounds crazy! It “makes no sense.” Unbelievers could think, “You’re nuts.”

It’s helpful, first, to recognize that neither you nor unbelievers have a vote for the way God works. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, says, “...Christ on the cross seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction....”

So, here’s a plan. First of all, get this: God is so smart! Remember this: People value what they pay for. Since no one can purchase salvation, the closest plan to that is this: Most people value what someone else pays for and gives you as a gift. When it comes to salvation, the Giver is not just somebody else. This gift is from the One who is God’s Son!

When you are sharing your faith with someone and get to the cross event, talk about the sacrifice—the cost. Talk about Jesus’ death, paid in your place.

Honestly, it doesn’t make sense, because we are not God. We don’t think like God. Paul tells the Corinthians that God says, “I’ll turn conventional wisdom on its head; I’ll expose so-called experts as shams” (verse 19). The reason we don’t get it? We aren’t God!

Another insight for potential new believers is this: The cross payment for our sins is so unlike our experience, it takes a leap of faith to accept it. EXACTLY! God is supposed to be different—way different.

When people get hung up on the cross, circle around to something that is elementary to everyone. Talk about how God has made a difference in your own life: health issues, behavior, marriage, financial challenges, whatever. Share your “God stories,” giving the credit to God, Jesus, faith, the Bible—whatever makes it a God story. No one can contest how God has impacted you. What you share is indisputable. If your unbelieving friend thinks you have any credibility, what is the worst that could happen? Your friend will become curious. Along this journey, there will likely come a time when Paul’s prediction becomes a reality: “For those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense.”

Witnessing with Wisdom: Sharing God's Story Through Our Lives

If you want a crowd of Christians to look down at their feet, talk about *evangelism*. Most Christians think about knocking on doors, talking to strangers, and interrupting their dinner.

In Acts 21:33-22:21, the Apostle Paul had just escaped a jail sentence—and, likely, murder—from an angry crowd in Jerusalem. Paul asked the guard, who spoke Greek, if he could speak. And he asked him *in Greek*! The guard, thinking Paul was an Egyptian thug who had tried to start a riot, realized he wasn't a criminal at all. Then, Paul, standing on the steps of the prison, addressed the crowd—in Hebrew!

This is yet another example of the “indigenous principle”: Speak the heart language of those you are trying to reach. This is why the style, worship and musical instruments, and approach to preaching constantly change—even though the message never does. This is why Jesus showed up in earthly form. You would think Christians would get it, wouldn't you?

Paul, speaking to the crowd of angry Jews, asked them not to jump to conclusions about him. This is another lesson for Christians tempted to judge and criticize other Christians.

Then, Paul told his story starting at Acts 22:2: “I am a good Jew,” he said, “born in Tarsus ... educated here in Jerusalem”—taught by the educated “superstar” Gamaliel— and

“passionately on God’s side, just as you are right now.” What did Paul do? Paul established his credibility through this introduction. Imagine that!

Then Paul confessed that, at one time, he had persecuted Christians. He established his humility and humanity by saying this. Honest transparency added to his credibility.

Next, Paul simply told his “God story” about what happened on the road to Damascus. What a great lesson! Paul, speaking to this crowd, demonstrated how believers should share their faith stories.

Every Christian has God stories to share. This is not evangelism, so don’t be too anxious about it. It is witnessing: Simply say, “I was there; it happened to me; I experienced God in my life.” This is not rocket science! It is simply what it means to be a witness.

From Prayer to Revival: Embracing God's Will for Our World

Do you pray for revival? Does your church pray for a major move of God when you get together for worship? Do you pray when you're in a Bible study group and include a request that the Word of God would spread throughout the land?

We Christians pray for a lot of things. We pray for the sick. We pray for financial resources. We pray for our country and our world. We pray often, in worship, the Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer has one part that says, "Your Kingdom come." It continues and implies that, connected to the Kingdom coming, is: "Your will be done." God's will. What He wants for us is always good for us, for our families, our cities, our countries, and our world. We get that. Yet, how often do we pray about the way that His will gets released—by the expansion of His Kingdom?

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1-3, Paul says, "Pray that the Master's Word will simply take off and race through the country to a groundswell of response, just as it did among you."

Now, it's not magic. The Master's Word doesn't race anywhere by itself. Theoretically, it could—God can do anything. And that would be a miracle! However, for some reason, God chose people—changed people—to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. Paul shared it with the Thessalonians and, in his second

letter to them, he asked them to pray that the Word of the Master, Jesus, would take off.

Basically, Paul was asking them to pray for revival. But there's more: He asked them to pray, knowing that, if God answered their prayer, *they* would be the carriers of that Good News—the Master's Word.

Some years ago, I got a little card during a sermon that was being preached. Everyone in church that day got one of those cards as well. It said, "Lord, bring revival, beginning with me."

What if everyone—every believer—prayed that prayer every day? Would God answer that prayer? Well, why wouldn't He? It's a powerful prayer, with powerful results: for you, for others, and for our world. Try it and see what God does!

Seeds of Faith: Understanding the Journey of Spiritual Growth

Many Christians are hesitant to share faith, perhaps even uncomfortable with praying for a meal in public. Why? Often it is the fear of rejection. Fear is the tool of the Enemy. It is also a challenge with binary thinking.

It goes like this: I share, or show, my faith. There are only two possible reactions: People will either accept it or reject it. They will either accept or reject **ME**. The *fallacy* is that there are only two possibilities: acceptance or rejection.

However, Scripture has a third option: *The timing is off*. Just because someone doesn't respond to the Gospel doesn't mean that they will be like that forever. Maybe they weren't "ready" yet. It has nothing to do with you. It has nothing to do with the Gospel. You might even say it has nothing to do with God. The timing issue is with people. It all depends on them.

Perhaps the best way Scripture describes this is in the stories about soil and harvests. A farmer doesn't take it personally when he checks his fields and learns they aren't ready yet. Isn't that one of the lessons Jesus taught His disciples?

Perhaps the "bottom line" is this: Don't give up on people. God didn't give up on Paul. His testimony at his trial before Governor Festus, King Agrippa, and Agrippa's wife, Bernice, is amazing. In Acts 26, Paul recounts his past. A strict Pharisee, he

considered it his duty to oppose Jesus. He threw believers into jail, voted for their execution, and disrupted worship services, bullying them to curse Jesus. He was obsessed with obliterating believers. Yet, we know how it turned out after the episode on the Damascus road.

Paul's experience on the way to Damascus is insightful for Christians who break the chains of binary thinking and see the organic realities of the timing. This is an amazing truth: Many people become receptive through a life-changing event—especially a tragedy.

The young woman who cuts my hair shows no sign of spiritual receptivity. I only get ten minutes with her, and the more hair I lose, as I get older, the time gets shorter. However, recently, her 4-year-old daughter, Eva, has shown signs of an advance of autoimmune disease. So, what would the Apostle Paul do? What should a Christian like you do? From what we learn about the faith from Scripture, it's safe to suggest the following: (1) Pray for Eva's healing. That might get her mom's attention. (2) I told the mom I was genuinely saddened to hear this news. That was not sympathy, but empathy. (3) I told the mom I would pray for Eva's healing and put her name on our prayer chain for every Monday morning prayers. (The mom said she really appreciated that. See how God softens hearts in challenging times?) (4) Then, as I paid for my haircut, I said, "I sincerely hope it never comes to this, but if things get worse and you find yourself wondering, 'Why do bad things happen to good people?', I would be glad to talk with you and Eva's dad—if you want to." I added that it wasn't a short talk during a haircut, but probably over coffee or something.

What would you say? You would be wise to state that God loves everyone—including Eva. But we live in a fallen world, and sin

has brought sickness and death, but God's promise is here for everyone: life after death. Is Eva a believer? Is her mom? Her dad? Sometimes challenges are opportunities to get serious with God and recognize that God is real.

On the Damascus road, Paul went blind. You could say Paul "went dark" so God could get his attention—so that he could bring light to both Jews and Gentiles.

Faith in God is never an either/or until you die. It's just "not yet." And a tragedy becomes an opportunity for you to be used by God to bring the light of Christ to a little girl, a mom, a dad, others, and the world.

Tending the Garden: Praying and Preparing for Spiritual Growth

There is a strange dichotomy about the Christian faith. In the fifth chapter of the letter from James, he writes to “wait patiently for the Master’s Arrival” (verse 7).

James relates this patient approach to a farmer, who waits for the valuable crops to mature, allowing the rain to do its work.

Do you have a friend or relative who doesn’t know the Lord? Are you concerned about your friend’s eternal destination? Are you troubled that your friend doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus—and is missing out on the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and more that the Holy Spirit gives through faith?

Some people quickly respond to the Good News about the Savior. Others take a long time. If you have a relationship with that person—and have heartburn for their salvation—will you hang in there for the long haul?

And then there is this paradox. James says, in verse 8 of chapter 5, “The Master could arrive at any time.” In that thought, there is a sense of urgency! Yeah, it feels like an oxymoron—a spiritual contradiction! Can you live with that?

Jesus said to the disciples, “...look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35 NIV). The subject wasn’t corn or wheat. His subject is clearly—and always will be—people.

On another occasion, in Matthew 10:11-15, Jesus said to His followers, “When you enter a town or village, don’t insist on staying in a luxury inn. Get a modest place with some modest people, and be content there until you leave. When you knock on a door, be courteous in your greeting. If they welcome you, be gentle in your conversation. If they don’t welcome you, quietly withdraw. Don’t make a scene. Shrug your shoulders and be on your way. You can be sure that on Judgment Day they’ll be mighty sorry—but it’s no concern of yours now.” So, basically, if people receive you, go in and spend time with them; if they aren’t receptive, move on.

We, as believers, live in this tension of faith: already/not yet. I don’t know about you, but, in my weakness, it’s easier to blow off people and move on if they’re not interested. Yet, the Lord never gives up on anyone. Personally, I’m glad; aren’t you?

For most Christians, it’s a challenging discipline: There is an urgency for people to know Jesus. He could come back at 5 p.m. today. Your friend could also get hit by a bus at 4:49 p.m.

For most of us, we need a big dose of divine discernment: Is the crop—the person—spiritually ripe? We also need the discipline of spiritual cultivation—to encourage the eternal seeds of faith to sprout and grow, by God’s power, toward harvest.

The tension may not be our greatest challenge. By observation, the real issue may be this: Are you tending the garden, praying for growth—and the miracle of faith?

Conclusion

The heart of outreach is not about getting people to attend worship services—it is about living as the sent people of God in everyday life. For too long, many churches have assumed that the best way to reach others is through attraction: “If we build it, they will come.” Yet Jesus’ command was not “invite them in” but “go and make disciples.” The church is not a destination—it is a launchpad for mission.

When outreach is reduced to programs or marketing efforts that get people to walk through church doors, we miss the bigger vision Jesus gave us. True Kingdom impact happens when believers see themselves as **missional entrepreneurs**—people who take ownership for the Great Commission, who creatively find ways to build relationships, meet needs, and bring the presence of Christ into everyday places. Like entrepreneurs, they experiment, take risks, and try new ways to connect the Gospel with real-life challenges their neighbors are facing.

This means outreach must be centered on relationships, not events. A church may have a sign out front, a polished website, or even well-planned worship services—but most people who come to faith do so through trust, friendship, and someone who took the time to listen and share their God story. When you step outside the walls of the church building and into your community with a posture of love and curiosity, you begin to see mission

fields everywhere: at the coffee shop, at work, at your kids' sporting events, even across the street.

Imagine what would happen if every believer in your group saw themselves as a missionary to their neighborhood and a missional entrepreneur in their community. Instead of a few staff or volunteers carrying the load, an entire movement would take root. Outreach would no longer be about getting people "in here," but about taking Jesus "out there." And when that shift happens, churches rediscover their purpose, disciples multiply, and revival begins.

Questions for Discussion

What does it mean to think like a missional entrepreneur in your everyday life? Where do you see opportunities in your daily routine to build Kingdom relationships?

Why is it important that outreach not be limited to inviting people to worship services? How does focusing on relationships change the way you view evangelism?

Where do you spend most of your time outside of church (workplace, neighborhood, school, hobbies)? How could those places become mission fields?

What is one personal “God story” you can share this week? Who in your network might need to hear it?

If you looked at your town or neighborhood through the eyes of a missional entrepreneur, what unmet needs or opportunities for ministry would you see?

If every member of your group took seriously the call to build one new missional relationship this month, what impact could that have over time?

What is one practical, relational step you can take this week to move beyond the walls of the church and into mission?

Ask yourself: *Who is God already putting in front of me? Where do I see needs, hurts, or opportunities in my community?* Then take one intentional step toward building a relationship, serving someone, or sharing a God story from your life.

Remember—outreach is not about getting people to come inside our church walls. It's about us stepping outside, carrying Jesus into everyday spaces, and living out the Great Commission in ways that are natural, relational, and creative.

Identify one person in your network who doesn't yet know Jesus and do something intentional to connect with them. It could be sharing a meal, checking in on a need, or simply listening. That's how revival begins—through ordinary Christians living on mission in extraordinary ways.



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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.



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