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Transformative Christian
Leadership Series

SHARING FAITH

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

In Colossians 4:3, the Apostle Paul writes, “Pray that every time I open my mouth I’ll be able to make Christ plain as day to them.”

What is your reaction to that? You might be tempted to say, “Well, that’s easy for you to say, Paul. You’re an apostle.” And, you might add, “I’m just a member of the church. Isn’t that the pastor’s job?”

Perhaps the real issue is this: How does Christianity influence our world? Is it through apostles? The answer is “yes.” But there is much more! Leaders such as the Apostle Paul (and the leaders of your church) exist under the biblical mandate to “make disciples, who make disciples...who make disciples.” This is the brilliance of Jesus’ movement. It is *exponentially explosive*. What does that mean for you?

Christianity is not just a belief, story, or spiritual influence on those who follow Jesus. It is designed as a *movement*. One thing is clear: Movements move! The Christian movement is built to move. Not like an organization. Not like a turtle. Christianity is a transformational force.

When you drop a pebble into a pond, it generates a splash—rings that emanate like circles, energized by the pebble. Christianity is a movement. It is designed to *move* in you. Then, it is built to move *through* you. Jesus said to His disciples, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew

28:19). Faith is an exponential event. Or at least it should be! Have you ever thought, “That’s the pastor’s job?” Scripture is clear: The main priority for pastors is to multiply disciples who multiply others. This changes your church from a “program” into a movement.

Sadly, most Christians believe that “growing the church” is the pastor’s job. Yet Jesus modeled multiplication. He developed twelve disciples. Their priority was to share the faith. Their goal was to multiply disciples. And they did!

Christianity moved from the small group to a movement. The key ingredient for this movement became sharing the faith. New Christians became messengers who shared the faith. Their leaders were clearly equippers. They understood their role: “make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples....”

Sharing your faith is not about preaching. You don’t have to be a Bible expert. Your expertise is defined by your experience. Has knowing Jesus changed your life? If so, you have a story to share.

This dynamic is not just for professional staff. It is for every Christ-follower. You don’t have to be an expert on Scripture, theology, or church. Just share what God has done in your life. Do that—and watch the Christian movement move! God will use you to change lives for eternity. Just share what life with Jesus means to you. It’s not rocket science!

Breaking Through the Fog: Overcoming Fear to Share Your Faith

It's quite clear if you read Luke 19:12-26. God desires that His followers multiply to grow His Kingdom. Why don't more people do that?

One reason is they don't get it. This could be considered the Enemy's *strategy of fog*. This fog keeps Christians from seeing the most dramatic potential strategy for reaching out to others on behalf of the King of the universe.

A second reason is that it feels risky. Yet, that is the Enemy's lie. I'm not sure what Jesus would say about it, but I believe it might be something like: "Get over it!" However, we should know that Jesus might say this: "Risk has its rewards." This is what it says in Luke 19:26: "Risk your life and get more than you ever dreamed of. Play it safe and end up holding the bag."

Are you a Christian holding the bag? When we look at Christians in worship, we don't see many holding hymnals anymore. But in truth, most of them are "holding the bag." You might hear others say, "Me? Share my faith? I couldn't do that!" There is a serious spiritual flaw with that kind of comment. What is it? Would Jesus, the perfect God/man, ask you to do something that results in failure? You wouldn't think so!

Disciples, Not Crowds: The Secret to Lasting Impact

You can't mass-produce disciples. Jesus launched the greatest movement in the history of the planet. There has never been anything like Christianity. It has changed the world like nothing else. How does it do that?

Jesus started this great movement by focusing on a few. He poured His life into them. Look at Luke 12:1-2. It says that "...the crowd...numbered into the thousands." However, Jesus' primary concern was with His disciples (Luke 12:47-48). What does that say to you? Are you interested in crowds, or are you interested in disciples? Raising disciples is a long, slow, one-on-one, relational activity.

Faith Transformed: Connecting with the Next Generation

Legacy. It is what you leave behind that really matters. It is what you have invested in the next generation. It is, in its greatest dimension, spiritual inheritance.

In truth, one of the greatest faith tragedies includes the tens of millions of young adults who chose not to follow the faith of their parents and their grandparents. What went wrong? What can we learn from this? How might Christians recapture effective spiritual legacy for their children and grandchildren?

Legacy is about passing on a vibrant, living faith to the next generation. In 2 Peter 1:12-15, the apostle writes, “I know that I’m to die soon.” With this sober reality, he continues, “And so I am especially eager that you have all this down in black and white so that after I die, you’ll have it for ready reference.”

Obviously, this letter from Peter demonstrates that these next-generation Christians are not nearby. And Peter has no cell phone or Zoom call available. *What* Peter writes is instructive. He shares his *personal experience* with his living Lord. He had a good experience too! Peter was on the mountain with James and John and saw Jesus transfigured.

“Oh, but I don’t have that exciting story,” you might think. Yet, in a way, you do! If you are a believer, somewhere, at some time, your faith in Jesus became real—it came alive. In a way,

every Christ-follower has experienced his or her own “transfiguration experience.” You don’t have to be Peter to impact the next generation with eternal spiritual legacy.

There are three key points—powerful lessons for every believer who wants to effectively help their offspring catch the faith.

(1) The faith is caught more than taught. It’s great to have all the academic truth teaching for our kids and grandkids. But what will really impact them? Your personal faith stories. Your “God stories”—what God has done in your life and what God has done for your life. There is power in stories. Remember all the stories (parables) Jesus told? Remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “You will be able to be my witnesses”? A witness isn’t a biblical theologian. A witness is one who says: *I was there, it happened to me, and it changed my life.*

(2) Belonging to a church, with all of its ministries, is great. Yet many parents have offloaded their personal faith sharing to the Church as an institution. So many people say, “I don’t get why my children aren’t practicing the faith. We took them to church. We made sure they were in Sunday school. We made it easy for them to participate in Vacation Bible School.” What is the issue? These are all great ministries. Yet so many parents let the Church—the institution— “train up a child in the way he [or she] should go” (Proverbs 22:6 NKJV). The *personal* parental legacy was missing. And those stories are likely the most important and impactful ministry to the next generation.

(3) So many parents grew up with songs and worship styles that became a part of their worship life. However, every generation has its own heart language. The forms, the styles, and the “packaging” all change. And that’s all it is: just packaging for the worship, preaching, and teaching that must never change. To the younger generations, the faith became “foreign” because it

did not reach them in their own generational heart language. The “faith of our fathers and mothers” is the same. The packaging and delivery systems change with every generation. Refuse to change them and you will lose much of the next generation. Sadly, sometimes we worship the package rather than the gift.

Peter directs us to keep the content but package it for the next generation. When Jesus came in the flesh, it was called the incarnation. It was God’s irrefutable demonstration that you want to reach people right where they are. And that includes your kids!

From Shepherds to Storytellers: Updating Redemptive Analogies for Today

Missionary groups translating the Bible into new languages follow an approach called “dynamic equivalence.”

However, for established churches in a nation, publishers tend to perpetuate *words* that no longer convey meaning in the culture. Yet, those words are familiar, friendly, and comfortable to practicing Christians. Here is an example everyone knows: The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 has the words “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (KJV). Who, today, says “thy”?

This is the test for dynamic equivalence: It is the language people dream in and make love in.

If pastors were trained as missionaries—instead of maintenance-oriented approaches to existing churches—if pastors were trained to lead churches with a top priority of mission—they would *never* use hymnals, worship materials, Bibles, Bible studies, or programs that do not speak clearly without explanation.

Well-meaning parents tend to perpetuate this old language with their children because it is familiar to them—even though it is unfamiliar to the children, who represent the next generation of the Christian movement. In this way, parents unwittingly inoculate their children from a *living* faith. When they do this,

they cross over from a healthy tradition (the living faith of the dead) to unhealthy traditionalism (the dead faith of the living).

Another area that constantly changes is called redemptive analogies. Redemptive analogies are symbols that represent the redemption of humans through the work of Christ. There are many redemptive analogies in the New Testament. They worked well in the first century among people who would immediately understand them. For example, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. This redemptive analogy worked well for reaching people in the first century because they knew all about sheep and shepherds. For urbanites in the twenty-first century, this redemptive analogy, though in the Bible, requires unpacking. For evangelistic and mission purposes, it would be more effective to invent redemptive analogies that work for the target group you are trying to reach.

As new people become Christians and cross over from the secular world to the world of Christianity, they are born again and begin to grow as disciples. As they grow as disciples, we follow the Great Commission imperative to “teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20 GNT). At that point (not sooner), it is appropriate and even best to share the redemptive analogies in the Scripture, even those that might be quite foreign to your target audience. However, it will require unpacking the meaning for those who are not familiar with the analogy.

Yet, on the mission end of ministry, redemptive analogies not common to present cultural nuances are actually stumbling blocks for the Gospel to get through to those receptive to meet Jesus Christ.

“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood” (John 1:14). Be like Jesus. That is the contemporary version of the “old school” language about the “incarnation.”

God Stories as Kingdom Builders: Spreading the Message of Christ

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. What brought the crowd? The Passover holiday celebration was a big part of it. What brought the crowds to Jesus? **Verse 17:** “The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, was there giving eyewitness accounts.” **Verse 18:** “It was because they had spread the word of this latest God-sign that the crowd swelled to a welcoming parade.”

The location was Lagos, Nigeria, in West Africa. The conference was an opportunity to teach approximately five thousand pastors. David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the largest church in the world (and perhaps in Christian history) in Seoul, Korea, was the announced lead speaker. However, Cho was under “house arrest” in South Korea. There had been a threat on his life, and the government did not want him getting on an airplane under this threat, which could endanger all of the passengers. He was stuck at home.

I was asked to fill in for Cho as the primary speaker for the conference. It felt like this was God’s version of a major divine joke! Nevertheless, I was excited to be invited.

Uma Ukpai, known as the “Billy Graham of Africa” in those days, was the local organizer of this huge conference. Prior to the conference, he held a rally in the town square. He preached to

a large crowd. My wife, Janet, and I were in the front row on the platform. After Uma gave the message, he invited people from the crowd to come forward for prayer. This experience will forever be embedded in my mind. A mother and father brought their young girl, who was blind from birth. Uma called one of our team members to come forward and pray for her as he prayed with others. Many of us were involved in praying for those who were sick or who had other needs. The girl who was blind received her sight, miraculously, by the power of God. It was fascinating to see this young girl look at her mother's face for the very first time. She put her hand up and felt the features of her mother's face because that was all she had ever been able to comprehend prior to receiving her sight. She was looking at her mother for the first time in her life.

This made a great impact on the crowd and had a significant paradigm stretch for me as well. Word began to spread throughout the city. The headlines in the Muslim-run newspaper the next day communicated the miraculous healing that had taken place. This provided an enormous attendance boost to the crusade that occurred at the end of the week. That crusade, held at a place called the Sand Lake, which had been developed into an outdoor amphitheater, was reported to have a crowd of two hundred fifty thousand people. From the platform, I literally could not see the end of the crowd! I thought about the impact of the raising of Lazarus and how the story spread throughout Bethany and Jerusalem.

God's stories do not have to be spectacular miracles. Everything God does in our lives is a God story. Everything God does in our lives is miraculous. Here's the point: God stories draw crowds. On that first Palm Sunday, the God story of Lazarus turned it into a parade. When your Bible class or your small group shares God stories—what God has done in your

life lately—it draws people like a magnet—even non-believers. When you tell your God stories, what God has done in your life, Christians are empowered. They are reminded that God is alive and well and working every day in our world. When they touch non-Christians, they improve receptivity on the journey to faith. God stories are a conduit for Kingdom growth.

Keeping It Simple: Making Christ Clear to the World

There is a place for theologians in the Church. We can all learn from those who are lifelong students of the Bible. Teaching is a gift to the Church. However, it should not be confused with sharing the Good News—the Gospel—with others who are not yet believers.

The Apostle Paul says, in his letter to the Christians at Colossae, “Pray that every time I open my mouth I’ll be able to make Christ plain as day to them” (4:3).

Paul writes this from jail. He’s asking for prayer that, as he shares Christ with those around the jail, he will speak in a way that is understandable. Some people make that which is difficult simple. It takes a special kind of “genius” to make something simple difficult.

There’s an African proverb that says that the Good News about Jesus—and the whole Bible—is like a river: “so simple a child can swim, so difficult an elephant can drown.”

Paul continues, in verses 5-6, urging the Christians to use their heads as they live and work among people who are not yet Christians. This is great wisdom—not always caught by preachers and church members alike. It’s the “KISS” principle applied to sharing Christ: “Keep It Simple, Stupid!” Paul urges the Colossian Christians to be gracious—full of grace—in their

speech. Why? He says that, when you share faith, don't use words or ideas that put others down and therefore exclude them from the Good News. Don't speak over their heads!

Here is the challenge: In the church, we sometimes use language that is old, out-of-date, or "in-house": It's meaningful to us but not to "outsiders" or newcomers to the faith. Words like "Thee" and "Thy" and the word "Sabbath" are just a few examples.

Sometimes church leaders drift into theological jargon that any newcomer would think, when they hear it, we come from another planet. We use words like "hymns," but no "hers." We use words like "Lent," which is not the same thing as "lint." Chairs are sometimes called pews, but they don't usually stink! At Easter, some Christians say, "He *is* risen!" Why can't we just say, "He *has* risen," or, better yet, "He's alive!"

What is Paul getting at? If you have a mission mentality, your objective is to get the message about Jesus out as uncluttered as possible. It is your divine goal to get the Good News to those who are "babies in Christ," even though they might be ninety years old!

Keeping the Message Alive: Proclaiming the Gospel with Intensity

Why do you think some churches are declining? Why does this powerful faith sometimes seem impotent? How is it that the Christian faith, once the dominant influence in society, can become marginalized to the sidelines of life by so many?

The answer is not so simple. Yet, at the causative level, it can be summed up as subtle but devastatingly spiritual drift. Here are a few examples: Jesus died so people could live. The central and powerful message of the Gospel finds its center on salvation. Yet, many church people are busy with peripheral issues. While John 3:16 is the central topic, in reality it is buried in the peripheral priorities of so many churches.

Another area of drift is the secularization of key biblical strategies. For example, Scripture says church leaders equip all Christians in their churches for the work of ministry. Yet, for many churches—and church members—the staff does *real* ministry, and the priesthood of believers is buried in activities that are not focused on the key elements of salvation. Spiritual gifts are God's way of defining where each Christian is called to serve. This biblical concept is often buried in the "church closet" by the secular approach of volunteerism.

What is the real issue behind the issue? Paul's instructions to the young pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 are basic. Paul reminds him that God Himself is "looking over your shoulder.

Christ himself is the Judge, with the final say on everyone...” (verse 1).

In verses 2-5, the apostle gets specific. He says, “...proclaim the Message with intensity.” He continues, “Challenge, warn, and urge your people.”

This is not as easy as it sounds. Why? If you tell it like it is, some people will leave the Church. It is clear that Paul gets that! He confesses, in verses 3-5, “...there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food—catchy opinions that tickle their fancy.”

Paul sums up in verse 5: “...keep the Message alive....”

What an interesting comment! Jesus is the Message in the flesh—and they couldn’t kill Him! Yet, you and I can kill the power of the Gospel. Now that’s a scary thought! And it should be. Nothing can stop the powerful movement of the Christian faith: not the enemy, not sin, not philosophies or secularism. *Yet, church people can.* How? By reducing the truths of the Gospel—of Scripture—by neglect or by watering down the truth. It’s a scary thought, isn’t it? So, do you “proclaim the Message with intensity”?

Unfiltered Truth: Avoiding Watered-down Christianity

There's a saying: "Keep the main thing the main thing." It reflects focus. Whatever you do in life, if you want to be effective, you must be focused. Most people get this. It is a nonnegotiable reality. Yet, when people get into groups, this reality can fade. Sadly, you see this in many churches.

Second Corinthians 2:12-17 is a brilliant and powerful directive for every Christian and every church. It's about the "main things." Paul begins on the subject of receptivity. He says that he traveled to Troas. He reports in verse 12, "I found the place wide open."

There is a subtle, often unconscious lie many Christians come to believe: "Most people aren't interested to hear the Good News about Jesus Christ." Believing that lie, Christians—and their churches—abandon their priority—the main thing: of outreach.

The truth is, many people are more receptive than you might think. When people have a challenge, they are receptive. When they experience change, they are receptive. Everyone experiences moments of receptivity. Do you recognize them?

A second point Paul writes about is that "through us"—through every Christian—God "brings the knowledge of Christ." Not through "church." Not through "pastors." But through *all*

believers. Everyone is a minister, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:11-12.

Then Paul teaches about rejection. When you share your faith, sooner or later you will come across someone who is “just not interested.” This fear of rejection is what stops many Christians from ever sharing their faith. Paul says it just goes with the territory. Don’t take it personally. Paul says it’s never personal. It’s not about you. Those who reject you are rejecting God. They are people already on the road to destruction. So, what do you do? Like Jesus says (Matthew 10:14 NIV), if people won’t listen to your God stories, your witness, “shake the dust off your feet” and move on. Rejection? Shake it off!

Then Paul warns about something else that is prevalent for many Christians and many churches. This is what happens. Most of what the Bible says does not fit secular thinking. That should be no surprise. So, what do many Christians do? Water it down and/or ignore it. However, Paul is direct in 2:16: “...we don’t take God’s Word, water it down, and then take it to the streets to sell it cheap.” Anyone—any church—that does so loses the power to change anyone for eternity.

Paul ends this chapter, 2 Corinthians 2, by giving us strength to be bold witnesses to others. He says, “We get what we say straight from God and say it as honestly as we can.” So, what is the greatest challenge for every believer and every church? *Get out of God’s way! Let go, and let God.* And He will use you to change the world, one person at a time.

Conclusion: Small Group Study

As you wrap up this study, remember that sharing your faith is not reserved for professionals or “spiritual experts.” The picture Scripture gives us is a movement, not a club; a living, multiplying body, not a religious program. Jesus calls every believer to be part of a ripple effect, like a pebble dropped into water. He works in you so that He can work through you. Your story, your God moments, your everyday experiences with Jesus are the raw materials He uses to reach others, one relationship at a time.

This means your church is most effective when pastors equip people, not when staff members do all the ministry. The real impact comes when disciples make disciples who make more disciples. That requires courage to move through the fog of fear, to take risks, and to trust that Jesus would never ask you to do something that is destined to fail. It also means refusing watered-down Christianity. Instead, you keep the main thing the main thing: a clear, simple, grace-filled message about Jesus shared in language people actually understand, in forms and styles that speak the heart language of the next generation.

Practically, this will stretch your group to think like missionaries and even like entrepreneurs. You will need to experiment, try new approaches, update your redemptive analogies, and simplify your church vocabulary so people do not feel like they need a church dictionary to meet Christ. You will need to tell

God stories regularly and intentionally so that faith becomes something your children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbors can see and feel, not just hear about in abstract terms. The goal is not bigger crowds. The goal is deeper disciples who can be sent out with clarity, courage, and creativity.

As you look ahead, consider how this one study can become the beginning of a longer journey together. The *Focus On Mission* series is designed to help you move from information to transformation, from “church as usual” to a lived movement of everyday missionaries. Keep reading and discussing the rest of the series as a group. Keep asking, “How can we practice this here, with our people, in our community, right now?” If you will keep learning, experimenting, and obeying together, God will use your group as a living witness and a catalyst for Kingdom impact far beyond what you imagine.

Study Questions

Where have you most clearly seen God at work in your own life, and how could you turn that into a simple God story you could share this week with someone who does not yet follow Jesus?

In what ways has your church operated more like a program or institution than a movement, and what is one practical change your group could pilot to shift toward disciple-making multiplication?

Think about the language, symbols, and traditions in your church. What words, phrases, or practices might be confusing or foreign to someone new, and how could you “translate” or repackage them in your community’s everyday language?

Where do you personally feel the most “fog” or fear about sharing your faith, and what small, courageous risk could you take in the next seven days to push through that fear?

If you viewed your group as a “missional startup” inside your church, what new idea, experiment, or redemptive analogy would you like to test in order to connect more effectively with the next generation?

How can your group build a regular rhythm of sharing God stories so that testimony becomes a normal part of your gatherings and a tool God uses to draw others to Himself?

Looking ahead to the rest of the *Focus On Mission* series, what is one specific outcome you hope to see in your church's culture over the next year, and what first step will your group take together this month to move toward that outcome?



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①

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②

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③

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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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