

The Amazing Power of **GOD STORIES**

Share What God
Has Done in Your Life

Also by Kent R. Hunter

Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making

A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time

An Apple a Day: A Daily Dose for Everyday Faith

Who Broke My Church?

7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival

Discover Your Windows: Lining Up With God's Vision

Your Spiritual Gifts: Discover God's Plan for Your Life

The J-Dog Journey: Where Is Life?

The Jesus Enterprise:

Engaging Culture to Reach the Unchurched

Your Church Has Personality:

Find Your Focus – Maximize Your Mission

The Amazing Power of **GOD STORIES**

Share What God
Has Done in Your Life

Kent R. Hunter
with Tracee J. Swank

Copyright © 2023 Kent R. Hunter

Cover Design by PixelStudio, Fiverr.com/PixelStudio

Cover Copyright © Church Doctor Publishing

Formatted by Church Doctor Publishing

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact info@churchdoctor.org. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

ISBN: 979-8-39-593482-6

Printed in the United States of America

PRAISE FOR THE AMAZING POWER OF GOD STORIES

“Each day millions of Christ-followers interact with people who desperately need to know the God who loves and pursues them. Yet, many keep their God story to themselves. What if they were empowered to share their story? Kent has witnessed the power of the church mobilized to create a movement that expands the Kingdom of God, one story at a time.”

Duane Burris, Pastor
Life Community Church, Fort Wayne, IN

“Since Dr. Hunter introduced the practice of God stories into the life of Christ Church, it has become an inherent part of our shared life and faith. The outcome has been the multiplication of God’s known activity and the witness to that very activity. Our people now carry the stories into the everyday that surrounds them. Not only is this a must-read book, it is a must do opportunity that will multiply God’s work and witness.”

Robert Suhr, Pastor
Christ Church, Mequon, WI

“In *The Amazing Power of God Stories*, Dr. Hunter makes relevant for today the biblical model of sharing what we know with others. He shows how everyday Christians can pass along personal faith to a secular world. As a pastor, I want to lead a group using this book. It’s that great.”

Ralph Diehl, Pastor
New Hope Christian Center, Waterloo, IN

“I highly recommend Kent Hunter’s *The Amazing Power of God Stories* as a must-read for clergy and everyday Christians who want to find natural, comfortable, effective ways to share their faith. What makes this book unique is Kent’s ability to make ideas practical, easily understood, and easy to implement. Plus, as an added bonus, Kent’s humor makes it a fun, easy read!”

Jeff King, pastor, author, and host of
the nationally syndicated radio show
Everyday Encouragement with Jeff King

“Dr. Hunter has written a gem of a book that will be of huge help to many Christians. This book will encourage you—it will give you the courage to step out of your comfort zone and share the greatest story—your story. The practical nature of the book means it will not remain theories on a page, but equip you to better serve Christ. I am excited that this book will bear much fruit for the Kingdom.”

Tim Tucker, CEO,
The Message Trust, South Africa

“Kent Hunter has a passion for supporting and building up the church. I am delighted that he has written this book.”

Nicky Gumbel, Pioneer of Alpha,
Holy Trinity Brompton, London, UK

“The Church Doctor does it again! Dr. Kent Hunter not only helps the reader understand what is not working in the church, but lays out very practical ways you can understand and act in ‘the ways of Jesus.’ Kent has a wonderful way to cross denominational lines and shares what Christ-followers need to be about—being witnesses, while sharing your ‘story.’ Kent walks the reader in a simple manner, how to share your story—in simple, practical, anyone-can-do-this approach. Too often, we

in the church try to make sharing our faith difficult. Well worth the read for anyone at any stage of spiritual growth!”

G. Scott Pattison, Lead Pastor,
The ConneXion Church, Kokomo, IN

“It’s so simple. Tell people what God has and is doing in your life. That is a God story. In Kent’s new book, *The Amazing Power of God Stories*, he expounds on how the church grows. Jesus-followers share what God has done in their lives with their immediate families, friends, and those with whom they are connected. Everyone can be a witness to the love and grace of Jesus. It’s not scary. It’s exciting!

Kent’s mastery of weaving his own story together with practical content makes this book a must-read for all Christians.

So go ahead, share what God has done in your life and watch the Holy Spirit transform the lives of people you love.”

Todd Stocker, Consultant
and host of *The PivotPreneur Podcast*

“A great commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment will not only grow a great church, it will also grow great missionaries.”

This has been my mantra as a pastor for 35-plus years. The question is how to actually get this done.

In *The Amazing Power of God Stories*, Kent Hunter and Tracee Swank have laid out not only the challenges that hinder, but a pathway to follow, by showing us how to use God stories.

We all have many ‘God stories.’ This book will help you put them into action as you engage others.”

Barry L. Kolb,
Pastor, Teacher, Missionary

“Kent Hunter addresses one of the most neglected, yet important aspects of discipleship: how to easily share your ‘God story’—how God has worked in your life. Filled with practical ideas and real-life examples, this book can revolutionize Christians, from inward focus to an outward mission.”

Bob Whitesel, award-winning writer/scholar
and directional leader of Leadership.church,
MissionalCoaches.network & ChurchLeadership.university

“Mission field or minefield? How do you view the world around you? If you’re like many Christians today, you engage family, friends, and acquaintances as if walking through a minefield. It’s dangerous, of course, but Christ calls us to be His witnesses. Author Kent Hunter provides insight on how to engage the world as a mission field, even if it means walking through a minefield occasionally. The answer is *The Amazing Power of God Stories*. This book provides powerful insight into how to use your own story to reach others for Christ. Read it, and begin telling your personal story soon.”

Gary L. McIntosh, speaker and author

Dedicated to:

George Hunter

Donald McGavran

John Maxwell

Gary McIntosh

Lyle Schaller

Elmer Towns

C. Peter Wagner

Rick Warren

Bob Whitesel

John Wimber

Mick Woodhead

Friends, mentors, colleagues, and champions for Jesus

and

those at Zion Lutheran Church who caught the vision to share Jesus

CONTENTS

Introduction: I'd Love to Tell the Story (My Honest Version).....	xi
Chapter One: Why Sharing Faith Terrifies	1
Chapter Two: When Hopelessness Helps	13
Chapter Three: The <i>Feel-Good</i> Trap.....	25
Chapter Four: The Evangelism Committee Catastrophe.....	35
Chapter Five: "I" Witness	45
Chapter Six: Launching a Movement in Plain Sight.....	57
Chapter Seven: The Platform of Relationships.....	75
Chapter Eight: Don't Feed a Baby Steak!	89
Chapter Nine: Adapt to the Mission Field in Your Backyard	101
Chapter Ten: Closing the Culture Leap	119
Acknowledgments	135
Endnotes	137
Appendix: Sample God Stories:	149

INTRODUCTION

I'd Love to Tell the Story (My Honest Version)

Verse 1

I'd love to tell the story
Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory,
Of Jesus and His love.
I'd love to tell the story,
Because I know it's true;
But I am really scared to death
And don't know what to do.

Verse 2

I'd love to tell the story;
'Tis scary to repeat
What seems each time I try it
My heart just skips a beat.
I'd love to tell the story
For most have never heard.
I feel like such a failure,
A spiritually tongue-tied nerd.

Refrain

I'd love to tell the story,
But rather go to glory
Than tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.

Refrain

I'd love to tell the story,
But rather go to glory
Than tell the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love.

(Note: I really do love this beautiful hymn the way it was originally written!)

The Amazing Power of God Stories

Anyone can make something simple difficult. It takes a genius to make something difficult simple. That genius is Jesus. He launched the largest, longest-lasting, most impactful movement on the planet. Jesus is the leader. His approach is basic, but profound! He is: (1) the Son of God; (2) our Savior; (3) the genius. Those three reasons are why you should read this book, apply it to your life, let it impact your church, and start changing the world, one God story at a time.

At the center of Jesus' movement is multiplication: believers inviting others to become followers of Jesus. The process is not rocket science. It is not intended to be a program. It is a way of life. It is not complicated. It is natural proclamation.

As a Christian, you are a “witness,” an eyewitness: “I’ve been there. It happened to me. I have a story to tell. In fact, I have many stories to tell. Jesus makes a difference in my life.” Jesus was a storyteller. He wants you to tell your God stories. Why? Stories are powerful!

Why do churches make this so complicated? Why do churches build elaborate programs and develop canned outlines? Sharing faith is not preaching. It is relating what God has done in your life. It is telling how Jesus has made a difference. It is sharing how Jesus changed you.

Being a “witness” is not about inviting someone to church to hear your preacher. Those who are not believers aren’t normally ready for a sermon, nor are they ready to hear passages from the Bible, which they don’t believe is *God’s Word*. Why would you invite someone to worship your God—someone they don’t know—yet?

Most people far from God aren’t ready to hear about how Christianity is “right.” *They want to know if Christianity works.* Does it make any difference in your life? They can argue about whether Scripture is “truth.” But no one will debate about how God has changed your life, your marriage, your addiction, your attitude, hope, outlook—everything.

I pray you will approach this journey as a personal adventure. Don’t ruin this opportunity by simply considering it academically. This

adventure is liberating: for you, for those in your social network, for your church, and for God's impact on your community.

Don't read this alone. Stop right now. Consider inviting friends at church to join you. Use the discussion questions. Why? Because this process will ignite a new *culture of witnessing*. See if you agree. In New Testament culture, "witness" is not just what you do; it is who you are, the person you become. When you catch Jesus' style, sharing your faith is not a job to fear. It is a lifestyle to enjoy. I know. I've been there. You'll read about that in the first chapter.

I saw research recently that says 72 percent of Americans believe "religion is important." But attendance at worship continues to decline. At this rate, we are looking at the death of many congregations. What will that mean for the nation? For you? For your grandchildren? For your church?

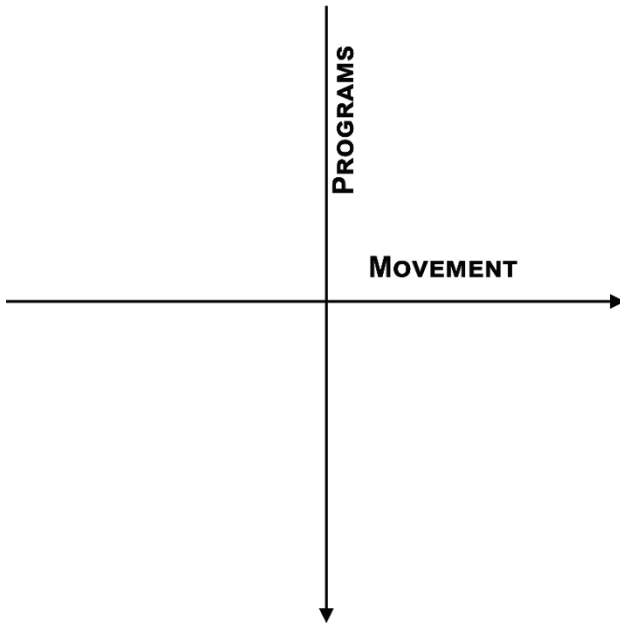
A recent Gallup poll in the U.S. asked: "Do you happen to be a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque?" Those who said "yes" represent forty-seven percent of the U.S. population.¹ You live on a *mission* field. Don't panic! It's not a *minefield*.

What is the issue? It is not the Bible or faith. It is our failure to adapt to the secularization of the nation. It's not your pastor's fault the church has declined. Most pastors, probably 96 percent, have never been trained for the mission field your nation has become. Most pastors were trained to manage Christians and "the church." Your pastor can't train you to become a missionary, because your pastor never learned to be one.²

The major design of Jesus' approach is not a program. It is a movement. Programs are top-down—vertical. A movement is horizontal. If you want your church to impact your corner of the world, you will see Christianity the way Jesus intended. The only *vertical* approach in the faith is this: (1) God sent Jesus *down* to Earth; (2) Jesus, after death, rose again; (3) after the resurrection, He ascended *up* to heaven, to the place of power. All of that is *vertical*.

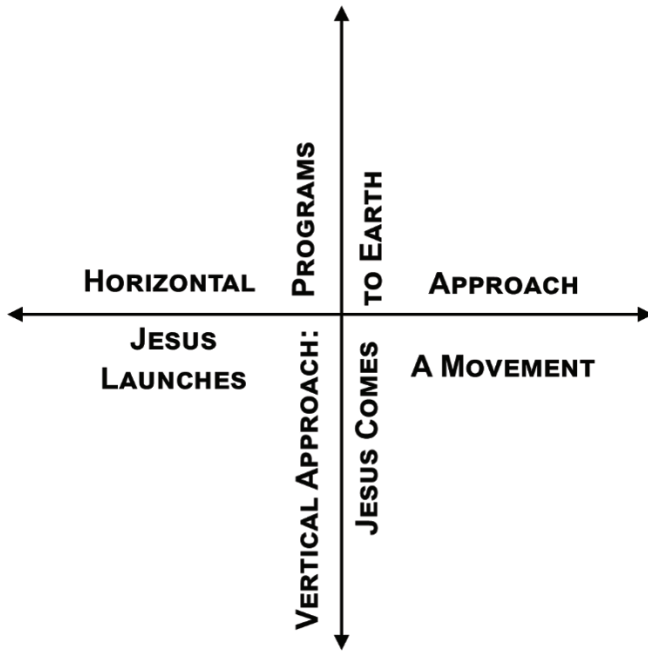
The Amazing Power of God Stories

However, your church is not at optimum effectiveness when it is vertical. In vertical churches, pastors preach, teach, marry, bury, lead worship and prayers. Elected leaders make decisions and ask people to vote.³ God’s people worship, volunteer, attend Bible studies, and give money for buildings, staff, and paid overseas missionaries. It seems normal, *but it is not optimally effective. In fact, it’s not biblical.* It is vertical: top-down programs.



Jesus launched a movement, not a program. A movement is horizontal. Your pastor and church leaders believe and follow Ephesians 4:11-12. They equip you to do the work of ministry. They do what Jesus did: They disciple. Then, those discipled equip others. They multiply. They help Christians discover their spiritual gifts—given uniquely to each believer by the Holy Spirit. Those gifts reveal God’s plan for your life.⁴ Christ-followers are equipped to be witnesses through the power of the Holy Spirit, according to Acts 1:8. *They share their God stories.* Believers become a movement. When Christianity moves *horizontally*, believers impact

unbelievers in their social networks. Whole nations are changed. Churches explode with growth.



In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, tucked neatly into chapter four, verses 11-13, there is a profound secret about taking the world for Jesus Christ.⁵ It is called “the priesthood of all believers”—every Christian is a minister. Strategists call it *exponential multiplication*. Missionaries call it *revival*. You will experience it as the rebirth of a *movement*. It is light years beyond another “church program.” As you continue to read this book, you will discover how to experience a horizontal spiritual movement in your own life and in your church.

For most modern Christians, it is unusual the way Paul looks at his imprisonment. The Romans put Paul in jail to shut him up. What happened? The Christian movement prospered!⁶

Think about this: If the pastor and staff of your church were suddenly gone, would your church prosper? Or, could this only occur in the New Testament? Not really! In fact, our Church Doctor consultants have helped many churches where the pastor has retired. During the

The Amazing Power of God Stories

vacancy, many of these churches experience growth in worship attendance and membership! Why? Because their former pastor equipped them for ministry. The Apostle Paul developed people. So did Jesus.

Consider how the Christian movement flourished without Paul's active leadership. First, he witnessed to the guards in jail. They were curious, wondering, "Why is this apostle in jail?" He saw the opportunity. Jail didn't stop Paul from sharing his faith.

Even more important, without Paul as the leader, what occurred among the believers? Paul writes, "Most of the believers here have become more sure of themselves...speaking out fearlessly...about the Messiah."⁷

Whatever has "handcuffed" you from sharing your faith, this book will liberate you! It will ignite your church in a movement. How do I know? As a pastor, my church and I experienced it.

"Yeah, but..." naysayers at your church might say. So will some pastors and denominational leaders. They will echo what happened among other believers. Paul continues, "It is true that some here preach Christ because with me out of the way, they think they'll step right into the spotlight.... The others...are merely greedy, hoping to get something out of it for themselves. Their motives are bad. They see me as their competition...."⁸

My guess? As you are liberated to share your God stories—and *you will be liberated, as you read this book*—there may be some reactions from two different directions. First, from "professionals"—some pastors, theologians, or denominational leaders who are "control freaks." Their issues? Perhaps they don't want to lose power. Maybe they are insecure. Or, they conveniently forget: Jesus is the Head of the church. Or, they could be program-oriented, the top-down, vertical approach. Second, you might get a reaction from other Christians. They, perhaps, are locked into programs. Their attitude is, "We've never done it that way." They may have a hierarchical view: "That's the pastor's job," or "We have an

elected board for that,” or “An evangelism committee has the purpose of outreach.” They may also falsely accuse you of wrong motives, as Paul shared.

Before you start reading this book, before you start this liberating movement to share your God stories, you should be clear about Paul’s conclusion to all these possible “aberrations” of sharing faith through your God stories. Just be prepared, and plan to get over it. How?

The answer is in Philippians 1:18-19. Paul writes, “So how am I to respond? ...I don’t really care.... Christ is proclaimed, so I just *cheer them on!*”⁹ This book you hold in your hands or read on your electronic device is written to “cheer you on.” Sharing your God stories will lead you on one of faith’s most exciting and rewarding journeys. What could be more wonderful than God using you as a mouthpiece to introduce Jesus, who changes the eternal destination of another person? Move the movement! Get horizontal—it’s biblical!

In this book, your journey will take you into two wonderful places. First, you will learn Jesus’ *real plan* to share faith and hope with everyone you know. Second, you will learn adaptive strategies that are different but easy to implement. Before you take your first step, pray. Ask God to impact you and others in your church to experience this simple, but powerful—fun, easy, exciting—journey you are about to begin! It will change your church. God will change others eternally. As you see God work, He will change you. You remain a church member, yet you become a movement person. You will become a missionary.

CHAPTER ONE

Why Sharing Faith Terrifies

There is a legend that at the entrance to heaven, two questions will be asked of everyone seeking admittance. The first is, “Did you come alone?” If your answer is yes, the second question is, “How could you?”

— Leonard Sweet¹

When I board an airplane, I always take work with me. I say a silent prayer, “Lord, if the person next to me needs You and is ready, encourage the conversation. If the person just wants to talk, let me do my work.” Yeah, I’m focused!

I’ve learned to share my faith in Jesus. Yet, it hasn’t always been that way. It’s hard to imagine, but I studied at a Christian college for four years, went to a seminary for four more years, then graduate school for three years. Can you believe it? A “reverend” with a PhD in theology who never learned to effectively share the faith. I didn’t, not in a way that is simple and comfortable. That came much later.

When I arrived in Detroit to pastor my first church, the congregation had declined 67 percent in the previous ten years. (Perhaps I should have never prayed to God that I wanted a challenge!) There I was, with all that education. I could preach and teach, but I was terrified about one-on-one “evangelism.” I knew the church had to reach out, or

soon there would be no people to pastor. I persuaded the church leaders to purchase the latest, greatest evangelism program. They also paid for me and a couple members to go to a one-week seminar to get trained.

Admittedly, the evangelism training was good stuff, well taught. I was fired up! According to the program directions, I recruited a dozen people “crazy enough” to knock on doors and talk to strangers about something as personal as faith. It was a top-down, vertical approach on steroids.

This brings me to the real title I wanted to use for this book: “How to Share Your Faith Without S%#t’n Your Pants.” The reason I didn’t use that title is obvious. The reason I wanted to use it is based on self-disclosure.

We went on evangelism calls on Monday nights for sixteen weeks, twice a year. Every Monday night, before we met, I had diarrhea! That might be “too much information.” Believe me, I know what you were thinking when you picked up this book. I believe anyone who reads this book will experience a genuine water-to-wine-level miracle. Honestly, I get that!

You and I aren’t the only ones, either. I’ve preached a lot of sermons. You can learn a lot by watching people when you preach. You know what? You can get the whole congregation to simultaneously look at their feet simply by saying, “In this message, I’m going to speak about evangelism.” And they look down the whole time! And when the service is over? You wouldn’t believe how fast the church empties!

So, now you know my history. If nothing else, you ought to be curious: “With that history, why would a guy write a whole book about sharing

your faith?” *It’s called a biblical breakthrough.* And I think you’ll love it! What really excites me? You will become an ambassador for Jesus. Together, God will use us to change the eternal destiny of many people. However, let’s look at why we are scared to share our faith in the first place.

**You will become an
ambassador for Jesus.**

Why Sharing Faith Terrifies

It is all about social etiquette. When the family is together for Thanksgiving, or you meet your friend at Starbucks, you can talk about anything. People today are more transparent than ever. It is a new freedom! You can talk about troubles at home, movies, football, the weather, your job, your irritating neighbor—anything.

However, you can't talk about politics or religion. Except—when you figure out if the person is on your political side, you can talk about politics. But religion? Not so much!

Another reason sharing faith is difficult? It is personal. At least, we think so. The staff at church? They have a “public” faith. It is their job, right? But the rest of us? Well, we'll talk about what church we attend. But we really don't feel comfortable about getting to the heart of faith. You're probably not going to visit your friend in the next cubicle at work and ask, “Are you certain that if you drop over dead right now, you'd go to heaven?”

There is another reason we don't go there. Our world is filled with mean-spirited arguments.² Check any newscast. You will feel the stress of a nation that is not very subtle on many issues. You don't need more stress—especially about faith. Even though faith can go a long way to heal our argumentative environment, you likely don't want to go there.

Further, it is normal to feel uncomfortable talking to strangers. Unless you are an extreme extrovert, you aren't going to try to start a conversation with someone you don't know, especially about faith.

When it comes to faith, there is another issue that terrifies: the perception that if you share faith, you need “evidence.” Yet, you don't consider yourself a Bible expert. You may feel uncomfortable because your Scripture recall is not trained to pull up chapter and verse on the spot. There is good reason. The Bible is huge, and faith is complex. You don't know where the conversation might go. How can you anticipate what verses might be needed? Yes, that is terrifying.

Consequently, we have come to believe spiritual conversations require and belong to the experts: church staff. We have “professionalized” faith sharing. In a later chapter, we will focus on two important realities: (1) sharing your faith travels best through relationships, and (2) church staff people don’t know many non-Christians. They spend most of their time with Christ-followers like you—and that is biblical!

There is still another reason faith sharing terrifies us. We don’t think people outside the church are interested. So, if we share, we’ll just turn them off, lose a friend, alienate our neighbor, or start an argument.

**We don’t like
REJECTION.**

However, perhaps the greatest reason is related to our personal and relational well-being. We don’t like REJECTION. We avoid stress. Rejection is painful. On that note, we circle back to evangelism.

Evangelism

Most Christians have some “clear” and nasty visions about evangelism. They think about knocking on doors, interrupting supper, and shoving Bible verses down someone’s throat. They shudder at the thought of arguing religion. Faith is a tender area. Why? Because your faith is close to your seat of emotions. You may even describe your faith by saying, “Jesus is in my heart.” So, if you get in an argument with someone about Jesus or get pushback, it feels like a spiritual heart attack!

There is this misconception: “Evangelism is force-feeding those who are not spiritually hungry.” Spiritual enthusiasts are characterized as those who are constipated with religion, looking for someone to dump on. It is common to picture some spiritual zealot grabbing someone by the shoulders, shouting, red in the face, preachy, three inches from the person’s nose: “Are you saved? Or are you going to hell?”

In truth, evangelism is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Like the rest of the spiritual gifts, only a small percentage of those in your church will have the gift of evangelism. Our research at Church Doctor Ministries indicates, in most churches, only about 10 percent of the people have evangelism as a spiritual gift.³

The Barna Group studied U.S. cities, identifying the percentage of those who are “post-Christian.” The research measures “the core of what people actually believe and how they behave as a result of their belief (practice).” The report unpacks “faith trends in the U.S. including reluctance to engage in *spiritual conversations*, an aversion to *evangelism*, and the erosion of religious belief and practice.”⁴ You see, we’re not the only ones! Do you see the difficult environment for evangelism?

In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul writes about the “equipping” gifts, sometimes described as “offices.” They are the “leader types” in the Christian movement. They include: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Their role? “To equip God’s people for the work of ministry.”

The primary role of these “equippers” is not to do ministry *for* others. It is to do God’s work *with* others, to equip all believers for ministry, *according to their gifts*. We will look at spiritual gifts in depth in Chapter Four.

The Role of Witness

If you have the supernatural gift of evangelist, you will *want* to focus on evangelism, because God has given you that gift. And you will love it! However, for every spiritual gift, there is a corresponding role—exercised by all Christians. If you don’t have the gift of evangelist, you are in the majority—90 percent (plus or minus) who have the *role* of being a *witness*. Witnessing is much different than evangelism. Evangelists are like spiritual pediatricians. They know when the Holy Spirit has prepared someone to be “born again.”

Here is the difference. My friend Frank has the gift of evangelist. It is not about his education, knowledge, training, or personality. It is his spiritual gift. He can “read” a person, spiritually. It is like God tells him when a person is “ready.” Watching Frank, I believe God actually directs him to people who are “ready.” God gives him the right words, at the right time, in the right way. When God uses your gifts, whatever they are, it is miraculous. For Frank, that miracle occurs in evangelism.

I don’t have the gift of evangelism. However, like most Christians, I have the role of witness. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, speaking about *all* His followers, “The Holy Spirit is coming to you, and you [all] will be My *witnesses*, in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁵

This is a powerful statement. When we witness, it is not by our power. The Holy Spirit is at work through us—just like with those who have the gift. However, there is a difference. Witnessing is the role of all Christians. The setting is also important. We are supposed to witness in “our Jerusalem”—where we live; also, in our “Judea”—the larger area, perhaps our state or country, maybe even to that person next to you on an airplane; and in our “Samaria,” when we witness cross-culturally. You might not be called to be a missionary or even have that gift, but you likely will have an opportunity to share your faith among people of another culture different from your own. And, finally, “to the ends of the earth.” As a Christian, you might have the opportunity to witness when you are traveling on business or vacation. In our mobile world, it could be anywhere. If you are a Christian, you have the role of witness.

When we witness, it is not by our power.

“Wait a minute,” you might be thinking, “I’m not comfortable about evangelism—or, for that matter, even witnessing!” Before you close this book, or your mind, look at what it *really* means to be a witness. What is the act of witnessing?

Your Pathway to God Stories

Have you ever been in court? Have you watched a trial on television or in a movie? If you have, you know what it looks like when they “call a witness.” It’s when they ask someone to come forward and share. *A witness is someone who says, in effect, “I was there. I saw it. This is my story; it happened to me. This is what I experienced.”*

We will look at witnessing in depth in Chapter Five. However, for now, think about this: Do you have a God story in your life? If you have been a Christian for longer than a year, you likely have several God stories. *God stories are episodes in your life where you have clearly experienced God working in some way.* They may not be spectacular, earth-shattering events. Or, they could be of great magnitude.

Here is an actual God story that occurred yesterday, for me, as I was writing this book. It was December 28. First, the backstory: When God called me from being a pastor of my second church, He actually pulled me into a new ministry. It happened incrementally over several years. Both churches I pastored grew phenomenally, as I applied mission principles learned in my first few years as a pastor. Eventually, Christians around the U.S. and beyond were asking me to teach, write, and consult churches and other ministries. I formed a nonprofit ministry called Church Doctor Ministries.

From the beginning, the board of Church Doctor Ministries set my salary. I chose to raise my own salary, so others could partner with my work personally. They are my support partners, and I send reports to them regularly. They pray for me and my family. Therefore, my position costs the ministry nothing for my salary, which makes it less expensive when we help churches and other ministries get healthy and effectively reach unbelievers.

Over time, I have outlived some of my older support partners. Consequently, as we reached the end of this year, I was several thousand dollars short of my salary goal. My wife, Janet, pays the bills at our house,

but we have often seen God provide in miraculous ways. We always seem to make it, and we give the credit to the abundance of God.

My God story is this: Yesterday, December 28, I got a text from the office that a number of year-end checks came in for my support, including a much larger, unexpected check. It was from an elderly couple's trust account. My God story? God is faithful and always comes through. That strengthens my faith—and my wife's. Maybe even yours because I shared it.

So, that is a God story. It is my story, but it's not about me. It is about God and His provision. It is about an elderly couple in a church I helped years ago. The story reflects their generosity and partnership with our ministry—to help more churches. No one can argue or debate. It is my story. It is, however, a God story!

As you read this book, you will begin to think of your own God stories. That is the point! For example, what if I ask you, right now: "What has God done in your life this last week?" Think about it. Perhaps you will become more sensitive to God's action in your life. Maybe you will begin to remember more of your own God stories.

As you think about it, more God stories will come to mind. They are events in your life as a Christian. In retrospect, I have a God story about my dad when I was five years old. But I never thought about it until I discovered the power of God stories. You will have the same experience. You will "resurrect" stories from your life years ago. You will learn to use them with others who demonstrate openness to faith.

**Begin to think of
your own God
stories.**

Guess what? Whenever you share one of your God stories, *you are witnessing!* You don't need Bible verses. It isn't necessary to rehearse, to make it smooth or professional. In fact, it is more real, more powerful, *even more effective*, if you simply share God stories from your heart—unrehearsed! It is not about you, never about you. It's about God.

You might be wondering, “What does a God story look like?” Check out the sample God stories in the appendix.

In the next chapter, there is surprising news! People right now, at this time in history, are more open and receptive to hearing your God stories than at any time in the last thirty to forty years. In Chapter Two, we look at why. It has something to do with *the power of God stories in the context of hopelessness*.

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter One

1. Be honest: How would you describe your feelings about sharing your faith? Terrified? Uncomfortable? A little nervous? Neutral or ambivalent? Excited? Now, ask yourself: Why?
2. Have you shared your faith in the last week? Month? Year? Several years? Never? How does your answer to #1 above relate to your answer for #2?
3. Do you know the spiritual gifts God has given uniquely to you? Do you have the gift of evangelism? If you haven't discovered your spiritual gifts, would you like to?
4. Do the leaders of your church know your spiritual gifts? Is the work of your church directed by the gifts of the believers? Do your leaders equip members?

5. Of the various ways sharing faith terrifies Christians, which one fits you the most? Why? Social etiquette? Faith is personal? Our argumentative culture? Not a Bible expert? It's the pastor's job? Fear of rejection?
6. Have you ever had a stranger share their faith with you? What did it feel like? What did it mean to you?
7. Did you know, before reading this chapter, the distinction between evangelism and witnessing? What does that mean for you? Are God stories intriguing to you?

CHAPTER TWO

When Hopelessness Helps

“There are no hopeless situations, only people who think hopelessly.”

— Winifred Newman¹

In the last chapter, we explored why we fear sharing our faith. There was a brief introduction to God stories. This exciting concept will be unpacked in the upcoming chapters. You will even learn how to launch a movement of telling God stories among your Christian friends. It is a wonderful way God will light up your life and revolutionize your church. I know: It happened to me, and it revitalized the church I led.

At this point, I want to reduce your fears of sharing your faith a notch further. Fear is not about you alone. It is one of the greatest challenges for most Christians—even pastors and church leaders.

Have you noticed? The media almost never deals with faith. Nor do talk show hosts. It is rare in films as well—except for the few great Christian stories. If you do see a character that has “religion,” the person is often portrayed as a fanatic or nut job psycho.

Ever watch *Blue Bloods*? It is one show where almost every episode has a scene with the extended family around the dinner table—and they pray. Four generations, with spouses and kids. They end their prayer, “In Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” How incredibly rare is that?

This is the point: The deafening silence about Christian faith, coupled with the more common spiritual abuse from religious weirdos, sends you a message: “Most people everywhere could not care less about Christian faith. No one could possibly be interested in hearing you share anything about what you believe. So, why would you ever share it with anyone? Nobody cares anymore.” The common perception? *People outside your church—any church—are not receptive!*

That is a lie, and I can prove it. So can you. Church Doctor Ministries works with churches that want to come alive, grow, reach out, and change lives. They want to impact their communities—and our world. We equip believers with strategies that work. We developed the SEND Movement.² We coach those in churches to see that “unbelievers” are more receptive to faith conversations than most would imagine.

One of the exercises we use in the SEND Movement is called “the waiter/waitress ministry.” We have practiced this ourselves, for years, before we added it to the SEND Movement training model. In fact, I did this earlier today, after church and before I started writing this chapter.

After church this morning, my wife, Janet, and I, along with our daughter and son, their spouses, and their kids all went out to breakfast at Cracker Barrel. What we did is just what has become our natural routine. I asked our waitress her name. She said her name was Ana. Then, when she brought the food, I said, “Ana, we’re going to pray for this food—anything we can pray for you? Anything at all?” She was a little surprised and paused. That is normal. In our secular society, faith rarely goes “public.”

She thought, then said, “Yeah, pray for my family.”

I said, “Great, we’ll pray for your family.”

She said, “Wow, that’s really nice—I appreciate that!”

So, when I prayed to bless the food, we prayed for Ana's family. In the prayer, I told God we have no clue about the details. That doesn't matter. He does! You shouldn't be surprised: It had an impact on Ana. My wife, who manages the finances for our family, gave her a large tip. Christians practice generosity because God is generous with us.

**Christians practice
generosity because
God is generous with
us.**

This scenario has been repeated by Christians thousands of times, all over the country. I remember telling a couple of our friends in Southern California about how we do this. They shared, "Oh, that won't work here in California." It was interesting: The next day, we were at lunch with these folks, and I went through the same process with the waiter. We learned his wife was about to have a baby, and he asked for prayer. I prayed, and he stood still, a few feet away, and listened. What was really interesting? Four or five other waiters in the restaurant stopped in their tracks and did the same thing. So much for the "California" excuse!

We have met waitstaff who have given immediate responses: "I don't even pray for myself" or "I'm an atheist." What do we say? We respond, "That's OK. Anything we can pray for you anyway?" Guess what? Almost 98 percent of the time, the waiter or waitress will give us some issue for prayer! What kind of atheist is that? Perhaps it is similar to some Christians who boast about faith, but it never shows.

Why would I ask you to consider doing this? Think about it. We don't know these people. They don't know us. They are at their place of work. There are people all around—sitting at tables nearby. There are other waiters and waitresses all around. The person we ask about prayer could easily think, "Maybe someone close by will hear what they're praying for." In truth, the odds are all against this approach—you would think.

When we work with people on this issue, we coach them to try this. Why? So they can learn the truth: *People everywhere are more receptive to the*

spiritual dimension than most would imagine. Even against all the odds: workplace, people overhearing, we are strangers. Yet, 98 percent give us some need for prayer. Sometimes it is general, like “family.” Other times it is extremely personal. It’s amazing!

This is the point: Don’t believe the lie! People are open: to God, to you. Don’t take my word for it. Try it. Experience it. Why? *You will move a little bit closer to sharing your faith, through God stories.* It is a little step in the right direction.

**People are open: to
God, to you.**

Why are some more receptive than we think? Why would they be open at this particular time in history? Why is this a great season for you to share your God stories?

Is the World Falling Apart?

“What do you do?” asked the man in the next seat on the long flight to Atlanta.

“I’m a consultant,” I responded, intentionally hiding my “church” profession so I might witness as a “child of God” rather than a “church expert.”

“What do you think of our country?” he asked, with a deep tone of despair.

I remained silent, anticipating another sentence or two from a man who wanted to unload his frustrations. I was right.

“I can’t remember....” He paused, looked down, and sighed, “I don’t remember a time when things were so screwed up.” He continued, “The government gridlock is so discouraging—on both sides.”

“Did you vote?” I asked, without asking *how*.

“Yeah, but I really wanted to write a letter of dissatisfaction with almost everything,” he said. He talked about political issues, moral

failures, racial tensions, people who break the law, disruption, separations in families, the use of drugs—so many challenges. I thought, “This guy must follow the news every day!”

“Yeah, a lot of people seem to be struggling,” I said, wondering if he was a person of faith, a person of lapsed faith, no faith, or whatever.

The conversation continued for almost thirty minutes. By then I felt comfortable and shared one of my God stories. Many conversations these days reflect the unrest in our nation and our world. It could be called “emotional instability.”³ It occurs in every social unit, from time to time—even in churches. It is painful, but worth considering—as *a window of opportunity*.

In the world today, there are many who reflect a rising level of pessimism about the future. When I was young, I noticed that older people would complain about the way the world was “falling apart.” So, lately, I’ve been wondering if it was just me. However, research shows that even younger people are discouraged. What is occurring?

Many reflect a rising level of pessimism about the future.

People are hopeless. Our research has led us to the conclusion that the rise in receptivity to spiritual matters is related to *hopelessness*. For Christians, our hope is in Christ. The Bible calls Jesus the source of a “living hope.”⁴ If you conducted a word study on “hope” in the New Testament, you might be surprised how often the concept is mentioned.

This is how you can explore *hopelessness*. It will encourage you to share your God stories. Think about those in your social network who are *functionally* unchurched. They never go to church—not even on Christmas or Easter. (Jesus taught us that we should never judge others. So, don’t look at this as a judgment or condemnation.) The idea is to identify those who may not have a relationship with Christ and, consequently, never worship. It simply means that they *may* be likely candidates for this exercise.

Think about their ages and the ages of their children. Project your conversation to a time about 20 years into the future. For example, if people are at an age where their *grandchildren* would be young, project it out about 20 years, when those *grandchildren* are adults. If people have *grandchildren* who are grown to the level of being married with their own children, change the target to be their *great-grandchildren*.

Ask them, “What do you think it will be like for your grandchildren (or great-grandchildren)?” After you ask, just listen. Let them talk. (Remember, these are people who show no signs of being active Christians.)

What you will likely hear is *abject hopelessness*. If you just listen, they will talk about their grandchildren (or great-grandchildren) having “no chance to receive social security.” They will go on to mention their fears about drug addictions, broken marriages, school shootings, bombings by radicals, and many other evils that fill almost every newscast.

You will clearly conclude that when people (without active faith in Christ) look to the future, they reflect a sense of hopelessness, often at the level of despair. When Christians use this exercise, they learn about the power of hopelessness. When unbelievers have a hopeless perception—whether it is accurate or not—the end result is the same. *Hopeless people are receptive to hearing about the God of hope*. Does that make sense?

This is why, in the New Testament, believers are encouraged to be prepared to answer everyone who asks “to give the reason for the *hope* that you have...with gentleness and respect...”⁵

**Hopeless people
are receptive.**

When you discover the hopelessness in many of those without Christ, you will understand: Their receptivity level is extremely high. It has been said, “You can survive a month without food. You can survive a few days without water. You can survive a few minutes without air. But you can’t survive a second without hope.”⁶

The Power of God Stories

Donald Miller has written a fascinating book called *Building a StoryBrand*.⁷ Miller underscores the enormous power of story.

Think about this for a moment: How did Jesus do most of His teaching? He told stories! They are often called “parables.” Jesus’ stories are profound. You can remember them. Even a child can understand them. Think about the story of the Good Samaritan: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers....”⁸

Think about great novels, plays, and movies. They are all stories. Donald Miller says this: “Here is nearly every story you see or hear in a nutshell: a CHARACTER who wants something encounters a PROBLEM before they can get it. At the peak of despair, a GUIDE steps into their lives, gives them a PLAN, and CALLS THEM TO ACTION. The action helps them avoid FAILURE and ends in SUCCESS.”⁹

Think about it. This book you are reading—*The Amazing Power of God Stories*—reflects what Donald Miller explains. Jesus’ parables are about the same thing. Now, think about *your own God stories*. Think about when non-Christians are hopeless (the PROBLEM) and you (the GUIDE) share your God story. You talk about how God changed your life (the PLAN) as you became a believer (from FAILURE to SUCCESS). This will encourage you to share more God stories. As you continue your relationship with those moving toward God, you will CALL THEM TO ACTION. You will see this in a later chapter. As they become believers, they get beyond hopelessness (failure) and experience life with Christ for now and for eternity (eternal “success”). This is the power of sharing your God *stories*! Jesus’ stories changed the disciples. God will use our stories to change others.

For many, hopelessness is the place where God gets their attention. It’s like Jesus said to the disciples: “Look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest. Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send workers into His harvest.”¹⁰ Hopelessness “opens” people to be receptive to you and

your God stories. It has always worked that way, even at the time Jesus arrived on this earth.

**Hopelessness is
where God gets their
attention.**

Hopelessness in Israel

Did you ever wonder why Jesus was born in Israel? Actually, it should be no surprise. From their days of captivity in Egypt, God's people were given an amazing gift. Consider their situation. They were slaves of a pagan government. Life seemed *hopeless*.

Then, through the leadership of Moses, God delivered them. What was their greatest gift from God? Was it fleeing the tyranny of a life of servitude? Was it the miraculous escape as God parted the waters of the Red Sea? Was it the sustenance God provided in the wilderness? Was it Moses coming down the mountain with the Ten Commandments? Was it the vision that God gave them to someday have their own land? The thread through all of this history is the powerful gift of *hope*. The elements of hope were a promised land and a Savior.

There was never any question about the location of the birth of Jesus. God, showing up in the flesh, was going to occur in this promised land. The prophets made that clear. Every believer knew it. The Savior would show up in Israel. It was no surprise to any practicing Jew who believed God's promise. The location was a "no-brainer."

However, the greatest question might be, "Why then?" It might seem like Jesus was born at an unusual time. Israel was occupied by the most feared empire in the world. Roman soldiers were present everywhere. Foreigners ruled the land God promised to His people.

How would you like it? A foreign army occupies your country. Soldiers everywhere—mean people who invented the most despicable form of torture and death imaginable: crucifixion. Further, this foreign government taxes you. They take your hard-earned money and send it to

Rome. Your money supports a pagan emperor who built an arena to watch people kill each other and called it entertainment!

Why would God send Jesus at that moment in history? The Roman Empire had smothered Israel and, for that matter, much of the Mediterranean world. Millions of people were under the tyranny of Rome. Why then?

People were hopeless, that's why. *Hopeless people are receptive to good news.* Those who are hopeless are open to hearing your God stories, too. No wonder the New Testament describes Jesus as a “living *hope*.”¹¹ The Scripture directs every Christian: “Be ready at all times to share the hope that is within you.”¹² This is a breakthrough as you grow in readiness to share your God stories.

In Chapter Three, we will explore another roadblock that hinders Christians from sharing their God stories. Think about it: (1) We're not only terrified because the concept of “evangelism” is scary, but in addition, (2) many think it is the role of the church staff. Now, we add (3) how churches get off target and sap the time and energy of so many Christ-followers. We look at that in the next chapter.

Seven Questions for Discussion
Chapter Two

1. Where would you place yourself as a Christian, right now?

Pessimistic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Optimistic

2. Are you often discouraged by daily events in our world? Rarely? Sometimes? Often? Can you elaborate?

3. How much does your faith impact your reaction to the troubles of this world? Not much? Sometimes? Often? Explain your answer.

4. Does attending your church impact your attitude in a positive way? Rarely? Regularly? Always? How? Why?

5. The Jews received a land promised by God. Can you imagine how you would feel about that situation when the Romans took over? What are some of the things that hinder Christian life today? What elements of secular society discourage you?

6. Would your closest friends and relatives say you are an optimistic person? If they say that you are, would they know that your attitude is impacted by your faith? How would they know?

7. When an unbeliever in your social network is discouraged, do you share “the hope that is within you,” your hope—through faith in Christ? Never? Rarely? Often? If not so often, why?

CHAPTER THREE

The *Feel-Good* Trap

We live in a highly fragmented, relationally isolated society. People move, change jobs, get divorced, commute hours each day, travel around the country weekly, then spend all their free time surfing through 1,700 cable channels and millions of Internet sites, and all at the cost of relationships. We have increased our financial capital, but it has cost us relational capital.

—John Burke¹

In Chapter Two, we focused on the high level of hopelessness expressed by many in our world who have no faith in Jesus Christ. That hopelessness fuels potential into the power of our God stories. Hopelessness generates receptivity.

The waiter/waitress ministry demonstrates more people are open and receptive to faith than we might realize. The diagnostic question to an unchurched person is, “What will it be like for your grandchildren?” For many unbelievers, the future looks dim. As Christians, we can share Jesus as the hope of the world.

Hope is powerful. Perhaps this is why Jesus, the promised Savior, arrived when Israel—and many throughout the Mediterranean world—were feeling hopeless, under the occupation of the Roman Empire.

The Roadblock to Sharing Faith

In this chapter, we explore one of the greatest roadblocks to sharing faith. It is not the “media” or the “terrible world out there.” It is the hyperactivity in many local churches. Too many church programs wear Christians out. An overload of activities can actually *hinder* you from sharing your God stories!

Church activities hinder our witness potential when they preoccupy every ounce of spiritual energy. My colleague, Tracee, is now the leader of Church Doctor Ministries. Not long ago, Tracee consulted a declining church in Michigan.

This church had one of the most efficient and impactful food pantries in the area. It was a great ministry for the poor. The church gave out more than a million pounds of food each year! This effort had grown so much that, Monday through Saturday, it occupied every room at the church. Many of those in the congregation were involved in this effort.

However, the church was declining at a rate so fast, death was predictable. The irony? They were feeding thousands who were *spiritually* “starving to death.” The people of the church were so focused on the food, there was no time or energy for anything else. There was no effort to introduce anyone to Jesus. Many of those they helped were no longer starving, “just” going to hell!

This church is located in a rapidly growing area, with many growing churches. Yet the congregation will go out of existence altogether in a few years if something doesn’t change. The food pantry was not a bad idea, but it was not enough. Tracee helped this church turn around. She didn’t suggest anyone starve to death. She guided them to add eternal hope to their ministry.

It takes a humanitarian attitude to supply food to those in need. It is also a great platform to build relationships and share God stories. Yet, in this church, spiritual delivery was not part of the process. Meanwhile, the food pantry exhausted most everyone in the congregation, as well as the facility itself. The church was feeding many people—most of whom

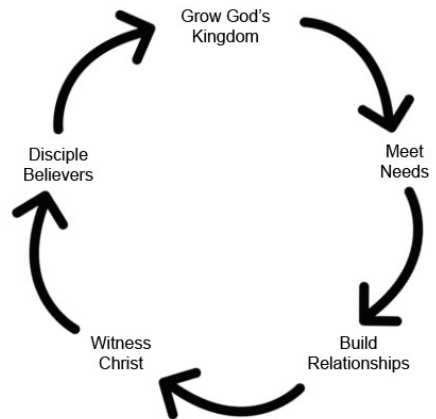
**When members
misplace their
purpose, it
represents Kingdom
drift.**

were spiritually starving to death. The church lacked balance. This is a common scenario for churches when members misplace their primary purpose. It represents Kingdom drift.

Kingdom Drift

In 1865, William Booth founded the Salvation Army in London, England. He had a brilliant idea. Most of the churches in and around London reached people from the middle and upper classes. Booth saw many in that great city who were literally starving to death. Most of them were without faith. He saw an opportunity most churches were missing—or ignoring.

William Booth started the Salvation Army. It was a wonderful concept. Most churches were not effectively reaching the massive number of poor people. He identified the need to fight hunger and poverty. He saw the need for education and job training for those who were poor. Booth was smart. He saw that meeting needs, beyond being a Christian effort, developed relationships. He realized that these connections provide the perfect platform for sharing Jesus Christ. He knew what Henry Cloud has said so well: “Your brain runs on three things: oxygen, glucose, and relationships.”² William Booth understood Jesus’ approach: Meet needs, build relationships, witness Christ, disciple believers, grow God’s Kingdom.



Early in my career, I was asked to address the leaders of the Salvation Army at their world headquarters in London. Why? Their

movement had stalled! They were great Christians who became experts at helping the needy, but, to a great degree, forgot about introducing them to Jesus for salvation. They suffered from Kingdom drift.

Several years later, I consulted a Salvation Army church in the U.S. I marveled at how they had become experts at feeding the poor. Many Christians could learn from them about caring for the “least of these.” Yet, this same church forgot to share Jesus. They were an example of the same Kingdom drift experienced by the leaders of their movement. I didn’t find anyone in that church who was witnessing about Jesus to those they were feeding. They were missing their personal, local mission field and failing to share their God stories. No wonder the church was declining! They were infected with what we call Kingdom culture drift.³

The YMCA was founded in 1844 and soon gave birth to the YWCA. This effort focused on a safe and wholesome Christian environment. It provided a place to live for young people who left their rural homes to work in the emerging cities of America. However, in time, it evolved to become “the neighborhood gym.” Originally, Christianity was more than a footnote to the mission of the YMCA. The movement was a community of believers, focused on growing their faith. The core formula was “total fitness,” which included spiritual growth in Jesus Christ.

The YMCA grew rapidly over time. However, the “C” (“Christian”) part fell out of the picture, and it became known as the “Y.” The YMCA became a place to work out, much like any other gym. The movement temporarily lost its core competency and distinctive.

**They were
infected with
Kingdom culture
drift.**

However, today the YMCA movement is recapturing its spiritual uniqueness. Many locations now have prayer rooms and bookracks with spiritual resources. Some have full- or part-time mission-oriented workers on staff. The “Y” in a city near where I live features the video

introduction to Christianity Alpha.⁴ The CEO of that YMCA directed its entire full-time staff to participate in the Alpha course.

The *Feel-Good* Trap

As much as most Christians feel uncomfortable sharing their faith, at the other extreme is the great feel-good experience of helping people in need. Guess where most Christians land?

**Many fall into the
feel-good trap.**

It is rewarding to help others in need. It is what Christians should do. However, what happens? Many Christians and their congregations fall into the feel-good trap. Christians experience the subtle drift into helping people for this life and neglecting them for eternity.

It is common for church leaders to tell members, “We are the hands and feet of Jesus.” This approach implies: If you are meeting the physical needs of those in your community, the mission is accomplished. However, Jesus also had a mouth. He also had a life that He gave up so people could know Him for eternity. He challenged His followers to *be* disciples and *make* disciples. Jesus taught Kingdom stories. Then, He called His followers to be witnesses—sharing God stories.

Recently, I consulted a great Methodist church. Annually, they ask members to purchase backpacks for kids who attend an urban elementary school in the city. It is a good ministry—no question. It is a feel-good experience for church members, for sure. Yet most of those same Christians would never consider developing a relationship with the families of those children. That church has never challenged the members to develop relationships with the school, the teachers of the school, or the parents of the kids.

That same church has a few members who know how to share their God stories. Yet, there has never been an effort to deploy them to that school to build relationships with the teachers, students, or their parents. There is no platform for God stories. So, how does that reflect Jesus’

priority: “You will be My witnesses...” in your hometown, a nearby school, or cross-culturally?

Remember: The best platform for the growth of God’s Kingdom is not a program. It is not simply a feel-good activity. It is not even bringing someone to church. *The most productive platform for Kingdom expansion is a personal relationship.* Your relational connections are the platforms for sharing your God stories.

However, some will say it “feels so good, buying backpacks—yet not requiring me to develop a relationship and share my faith.” It “feels so good” handing out food to the needy without

The growth of God’s Kingdom is not a program.

getting to know people and spending time on their turf. However, God works miracles through our relationships. Don’t put God in a backpack or a can of beans. Don’t play the game. Get in the game. Jesus did!

The Ironic Reverse

At the other extreme are all those churches that preach the Good News of Jesus “in all its truth and purity.” Yet they almost never reach out, equip people for ministry, train people to engage those who are unchurched, or meet needs as well. They remain the community of the faithful, *so heavenly minded they are no earthly good*. Those Christians are so full of “the truth” they are spiritually constipated!

This is the feel “right” trap. Good Christians hear sermons, read the Bible, and get a full, spiritual, meal deal every Sunday. However, many get no training, no discipling to reach their *personal* world for Jesus Christ. From God’s point of view, they got the Gospel, but missed the mission!

Dave Gibbons in his book *The Monkey and the Fish* said, “The world is tired of hearing the gospel preached by the church. They want to see it practiced by the church.”⁵ We are the hands and feet of Jesus. We are also “ambassadors for Christ.”⁶

**He died for us so we
can live for Him.**

We are supposed to meet the needs of people. As Jesus demonstrated, our most important needs are forgiveness, new life in Christ, and salvation for now and eternity. Our God stories are also feel-good events, for us and for the One we represent. *He died for us so we can live for Him.* We are the channels through which He speaks to others. Yes, that really feels good on the eternal scale. It occurs most often on the platform of relationships.

Our Unique Gift

Ask yourself: “What is it that you as a Christian can *uniquely* give to others?” There are many who help others with physical, social, and financial needs. It is good to help others, whether it comes from card-carrying atheists, Muslims, humanists, Buddhists, or whomever. It is also a Christian value to help heal the hurts of humanity.

Helping people is a great way to build quality relationships. What better, authentic platform could there be for effectively sharing your personal God stories about God’s mercy, forgiveness, salvation, and power to live? Introducing others to Jesus, our Savior, is the greatest, longest-lasting contribution to another person.

Jesus calls us to “make disciples.” That begins with sharing our God stories. Yet, it doesn’t end there. Faith is more like raising children than simply telling stories. Discipling includes equipping others to share their God stories as well. It is the key to momentum. It makes us part of a movement. The Christian life is not a program. It is a transformation of the world, one person at a time—in the context of relationships. Are you a movement person?

Helping people, meeting needs, and sharing what God has done in your life: It is not an either/or approach, but a both/and opportunity. This is the very

**Are you a movement
person?**

best you have to offer this world: Meet the needs of others and share your faith in Christ. It does feel awesome to help those in need. It feels eternally fulfilling to introduce them to Jesus.

Why? Faith in Christ is part of your legacy of life. It changes the

**Faith in Christ is your
legacy of life.**

value of your existence. You move from the symptoms of life to the causative issues that plague those who suffer. You guide others to the gift of

salvation through Jesus, with eternal consequences. For heaven's sake, can we get this right?

We are sent not to preach sociology, but salvation; not economics, but evangelism; not reform, but redemption; not culture, but conversion; not progress, but pardon; not a new social order, but a new birth; not revolution, but regeneration; not renovation, but revival; not resuscitation, but resurrection; not a new organization, but a new creation; not democracy, but the Gospel; not civilization, but Christ. We are ambassadors, not diplomats.⁷

In Chapter Four, we will expand on the sharing of faith from your church perspective and take a look at the evangelism committee catastrophe.

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter Three

1. Do you see the trend in your church as reaching people for Jesus or more toward helping people? How would you rate your church?

Helping people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Reaching people for Jesus
----------------	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	------------------------------

Is that number where it should be, or should it be adjusted?

2. For the question above, what do you consider the perfect number? 3? 5? 7? 1? 10? Why do you support the number you chose? Is your church growing as people become new Christians? How does that fit with helping people? Reaching people for Jesus?

3. How do you explain the biblical rationale for the number you chose in question number two above? Can you give Bible evidence, Scripture verses, for your choice?

4. Why do you think that drift, so often, is *from* outreach *to* helping with needs? What are the dynamics? What could you learn from focusing on those dynamics?

The Amazing Power of God Stories

- 5. How well equipped are you for meeting needs? How do you become equipped? Does your church help? What could your church do better?

- 6. How well are you equipped for sharing Christ? How did you become equipped? How does your church help equip people to do that? How do you help others to do that?

- 7. How would you rate your church on the balance of meeting needs *and* sharing Jesus?

Not so good 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Excellent

What is God saying to you about your church? What is God saying to you, personally? What are you going to do about it?

CHAPTER FOUR

The Evangelism Committee Catastrophe

For God so loved the world, He did not send a committee....¹

In the last chapter, we looked at one of the great Christian ministries: helping those in need. Helping others is a powerful way to develop relationships. Relationships are the best context for sharing your God stories.

Unfortunately, many Christians *end* the process at helping. Many church programs are focused on helping people for this life only. There is nothing uniquely Christian about helping those in need. Many others, outside of Christianity, help those in need. It is when we witness our faith—share our God stories—that the uniqueness of Christianity comes through. We provide help for the symptoms, and that's great. However, by sharing Christ, we take the issues toward a solution at a causative level. For Christians, our help toward others is for now and for eternity.

The limited focus on helping others comes with great satisfaction. It is tempting for Christians—and whole congregations—to become limited by *only* helping others. Why? It is so rewarding! However, as Christians, our uniqueness reflects the opportunity to also help spiritually. God has given us the privilege to help people eternally. God

works through our relationships, even as we meet the needs of those we serve.

We are the “hands and feet” of Jesus. We are also ambassadors for the Savior who heals, forgives, and restores. Our double privilege is that we can help others at their point of temporary need and, at the same time, speak to their eternal condition. God wants to heal through us. That is the eternal dimension. We are not human doings. We are human beings. We connect people to the Creator. We point to the Savior. Eternal miracles occur through the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

In this chapter, we look at the evangelism committee catastrophe. If you’re on an evangelism committee, board, team, or whatever you call it—God bless you! You are either really committed—or ought to be! Yeah, some of your best friends at church privately think you’re nuts—or at least “different.” Actually, there’s a part of you that really cares about lost people. You are one of those special people who get it: Lost people matter to God. Christ died for them. They *are* important!

It’s not your fault if the primary avenue your church uses is some sort of structure. It may be an organized program or an evangelism committee. In the present state of churches today, most are developed bureaucratically—organized with boards, committees, programs, and constitutions.² Most churches have some type of outreach group. My friend John says, “If the pastor asked me to be on the evangelism committee, I’d leave the church. Who are those fanatics, anyway?”

The Anatomy of an Evangelism Committee

Those who are part of an evangelism committee, board, or program are not fanatics. They love God, love the church, and care about people who are far from God. They are willing to serve. They want their church to reach out. Their passion is to see their congregation grow. They pray for God’s Kingdom to expand. Often, however, they have no clue about *how* to accomplish it.

Many who are on these committees have no knowledge about their spiritual gifts. In fact, most Christians don't know which supernatural gifts the Holy Spirit has given them. That's odd, because spiritual gifts discovery is one of the key elements to mobilize and grow a church. In the history of the Christian movement, every time there is a significant expansion, two New Testament teachings have returned to prominence: spiritual gifts discovery and the priesthood of all believers—everyone is a minister. The staff is there to equip all God's people for the work of ministry.³

If you know your spiritual gifts and they include the gift of evangelist (evangelism), you should *never* sit on a board or committee in the church. Your gift of evangelism signals that you are one of about 10 percent of any church, as mentioned earlier. With that gift, you should spend almost all your time out among unchurched people. You are a cutting-edge recruiter of people for the Kingdom. You should never sit on a board or committee. Your “gift mix” places your ministry entirely *outside* your church. Why? That is where you find unbelievers.

Those who are attracted to an evangelism board or committee usually share some common commitments. They sincerely want people to meet Jesus. They really care about those who don't yet know the Lord. They understand, clearly, that anyone who doesn't have Jesus as their Savior is headed for hell. They see the evangelism committee as part of the church structure. They have known nothing different than boards or committees throughout their entire church life. It is their worldview about how churches operate.

The way most churches are organized raises an interesting conversation. It seems that the more *religious* you are, the more structure you want. The more *spiritual* you are, the more “relationships” matter. In our book *Who Broke My Church?* Tracee and I shared the concept of “inverted outreach.”⁴ This inversion takes place when the

Religious → Structure
Spiritual → Relationships

church building or a program becomes the centerpiece of the congregation, rather than personal relationships.

Many evangelism boards or committees focus on institutional

**Members go to church.
Disciples go to work.**

strategies: publicizing the church, website development, the church sign, mailings, even “Bring a Friend to Church Sunday.” It is

church building/organization-centered. It is based on a “you all come” worldview of outreach. These approaches don’t work well, especially in a secularized society. Jesus says, “Therefore *go* and make disciples....”⁵ That is a relational approach.

If you have the gift of evangelism, the last place you should be is on a committee or board meeting at the church. If you are gifted as the one in ten Christians who have the gift for outreach, your most productive ministry is out among unbelievers. Evangelism is a gift used among those who aren’t yet anywhere near the church. You would be more productive sitting at a coffee shop than a meeting at church. It would be better for you to work your ministry at a bar rather than in the church building. Imagine that! Remember? It was *Jesus* who said, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”⁶ The *religious leaders* said, “He hangs out with sinners.”⁷

Like all the spiritual gifts, evangelism is special. It is unique, because it is so powerful to reach those who are not yet Christians. If that is your gift, you should also be multiplying yourself. If you are at the coffee shop to reach unchurched people, you will want to make sure you take someone from church with you, a Christian who also has the evangelism gift. You will be discipling that person, on the job, so she can use her gift to reach unchurched people. Unbelievers are those who are far from God. They are, therefore, far from church. This is why Jesus used the word “go” rather than the phrase “you all come.”

Every Christian should be discipling others to use their spiritual gifts. This applies to all spiritual gifts and every ministry, no matter what gifts God has given you. You should be doing what Jesus said: Disciple

others. My friend Mick Woodhead says, “Members go to church. Disciples go to work. Christians continue to learn. They keep growing, every day, until they die. Never stop learning. Never stop growing.”⁸

Every dimension of church life is caught more than taught. Evangelists should reach unbelievers and equip others who have that gift—while they are reaching out. This doesn’t work sitting in a meeting at church. It is on-the-job training as modeled by Jesus and His disciples.

Everyone Discovers Spiritual Gifts

The healthy, growing church is one where everyone discovers, develops, and uses their spiritual gifts.⁹ Your gifts direct you to your spiritual job description. Your spiritual gifts reflect your “sweet spot” for ministry, your calling. They also increase your productivity as you share your God stories.

The formula for a healthy, exciting, impactful church involves you in every way. According to Scripture, the church is not an organization. It is a divine, supernatural organism. In the New Testament, it says leaders are important, but every Christian is a minister. Leonard Sweet said, “Your baptism is your ordination into ministry.”¹⁰ Everyone has a ministry. Every ministry is different, because every person is unique. Together, all the people in the congregation make up this living organism called church.

The church is called the body of Christ. Christ is the Head, and every person is a different “member” of the body. Each one has different gifts, different functions. There is no mention of an “evangelism committee” in the Bible. In fact, there are no boards.

**Your gifts direct you to
your spiritual job
description.**

If you want to be a healthy, contributing part of the body of Christ—which you call your church—you need a spiritual GPS:

The Amazing Power of God Stories

- Gifts—define your unique ministry function.
- Purpose—is your unique role to make disciples by multiplying yourself: discipling those who also become disciplers.
- Story—God has worked in your life often. Each time represents a story—a God story. *Your God stories are your personal, divinely crafted mechanisms to introduce others to Jesus Christ.* Your God stories demonstrate the powerful potential Jesus has in the lives of those who trust in Him.



Your Social Network Mission Field

Those who are unchurched in your social network are your personal mission field. They are your *primary* target. They include friends, relatives, neighbors, those at work or school. This is a fluid mission field. It changes from time to time as you meet new people who become part of your social network. Relationships are your platform for sharing your story and discipling others. This is where you—and every member of your church—grow God's Kingdom by the power of the Holy Spirit. Discover your gifts, find your purpose, tell your story. Jesus keeps it simple. Most churches make outreach way too complicated!

**Relationships are your
platform for sharing
your story.**

Where does a board of evangelism or an outreach committee fit into that picture? How would you feel about a church that had fewer meetings? What if your church staff and leaders spent most of their time equipping disciples *on the job*? Would you miss all the meetings? Some churches suffer death by meetings. I've seen churches come alive and thrive by following the Bible's approach.

I have observed church leaders lay aside the inherited drift approach that wore them out while achieving so little. I've witnessed pastors, youth pastors, and outreach pastors rewrite their ministry position on the basis of Ephesians 4:11-12. Their primary emphasis is on-the-job equipping of God's people for the work of ministry. I have visited churches where members are disciplined in their personal niche of ministry designed by the Holy Spirit using their unique gifts. I've equipped church members who became disciples—and then disciplers of others. I have witnessed healthy churches that change the world, one person at a time. And you can see it, too, in the Bible. You can learn about it in history. You can observe it in certain places around the world today—where Christians follow the approach of Scripture. Wouldn't you like to be a part of that?

If you think church is a “place” where you go to “get fed” so you can do life—you are halfway there. However, you need to move past the *consumer life*. The joy, the power, the excitement is in your next leap of faith. Don't settle for being a “half-baked” Christian. Move on to find your divine niche. Discover your calling.

The Scripture says this about Jesus: “For the joy set before him he endured the cross....”¹¹ Jesus says, “If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”¹² So, you have to lose your life—lay down the present life first. Then, God helps you find it, really find it.

Disciples are not simply “members of the institution.” They are lifelong learners of Scripture. They are on a journey. They are spiritual apprentices who grow into mature disciples, always learning. They live and breathe Kingdom culture. This is what Jesus modeled. Like yeast in

bread, discipleship maturity is *unconscious influence*. It is not a program that comes and goes, nor is it an outline to follow. It is not something you have to think about and concentrate on. It is a lifestyle that grows. It becomes *unconscious competence*.

In the whirlwind of church activities—boards and committees, programs and activities—there is this life-or-death eternal mission. Many don't know it because they are missing the critical element of what the Head of the body called them to do: *apprentice disciples*. The whirlwind of activities and meetings has become a distraction.

Disciples are lifelong learners of Scripture.

I'm convinced that the way we do church, we overstructure religion, and it sucks the life out of the body of Christ. Set all your corporate religious traditionalism aside. Take a fresh look at Scripture. Take a new look at your congregation. Take an exciting view of your mission. Take a fresh snapshot of your community. Move your mentality from boards to body life. You are more than a member of an organization. You are a member of the body of Christ. You are an extension of Jesus—the Ruler of the universe.

How many boards or committees do you see in your church? How often do they have meetings? When they meet, what does it look and feel like? If you want to see what biblical church looks like, visit one of the “hot spots” of Christianity around the world. Catch the spiritual dynamics without the religious clutter. Think about this: no boards or committees. Should God's people serve on ministry teams? Absolutely! Would they use their spiritual gifts? Yes. Would that be perfect? Not as long as God uses humans! Would you be effective world changers? You would, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Do you want to be part of that? Would you like to be an eyewitness of a renewal of Christianity? Would you like to experience revival? Would you like to feel what it's like as God uses you to redirect the eternal destiny of others—and love it? In the next chapter, “‘I’ Witness,” we'll take another big step on that journey.

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter Four

1. Have you ever served on an evangelism committee (or whatever it might be called at your church)? If so, how effective was it? What were the tangible results—in terms of people coming to Christ? If it was not effective, would you be willing, right now, to serve on an evangelism committee? Why? Why not?
2. What is your evaluation? Is the evangelism committee at your church effective? Do you have one? If not, what group is the advocate for outreach? Is that group effective? Or is it simply a part of your traditional culture?
3. Do you want your church to grow by reaching new people for Christ? How would you describe your desire?

Not much

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very much so

What does the number you chose say about where you are spiritually? Where is your church spiritually?

The Amazing Power of God Stories

4. What *strategies* does your church have for outreach? Can you name them?

5. In your perception, are the outreach efforts of your church effective?

Not much 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much so

What are the results? What measurement of effectiveness for outreach did you use to choose that number?

6. Have you ever taken a survey to reveal your spiritual gifts as a personal reflection tool? If so, what did you learn? Do you focus on a certain ministry guided by your gifts? If you have not taken a survey of your spiritual gifts, when will you?

7. Does your church have a culture that reflects the “priesthood of all believers”? Do the leaders and the staff at your church see their role as equipping people for ministry? Or does it seem like staff does most of the ministry? If your church does not strongly reflect that everyone is a minister, how would you change that?

CHAPTER FIVE

“I” Witness

I went to the eye doctor the other day, and the technician projected a chart on the wall. She asked me to read from left to right. I began, “...A...E...W...O...U.” When I finished, I asked, “How did I do?” She smiled and said, “They’re numbers!” Sometimes reality doesn’t match our perception. For many believers, the concept of “witnessing” doesn’t match up with the biblical reality.

—Leith Anderson¹

In the previous chapter, we looked at the organized, bureaucratic form of the church. You see it almost everywhere. Meanwhile, much of the Christian movement is stalled. Church membership is aging and declining. We looked at the concept of an “evangelism committee.” It is a symbol of the “religious” structures humans try to superimpose on the living organism called the “body of Christ.” It sounds negative and critical, doesn’t it? It is an honest attempt to get you to rethink church from a healthy, spiritual, and biblical perspective.

There are two key elements Jesus and His apostles put into place for the effective life and growth of your church—and the Christian movement. **#1:** One of them is called the “priesthood of all believers.”

Don't get freaked out about the word "priesthood." It simply means that *every Christian is a minister*. Every Christian has a ministry. Your baptism is the beginning of God's call for you to be on His team. It is His "seal of approval" for your *ministry*. "Ministry" is your unique *service* to God. It is your divine calling from the Ruler of the universe. It represents God's plan for your life. Just like misreading the eye chart, many Christians have lost focus. Up against the biblical lens, much of what we do in church looks fuzzy.

You may not be called to full-time church work. But your service *is* ministry. When everyone in your church sees themselves as part of God's ministry movement, 24/7, it is a big step toward "results." What results? The effectiveness of your mission, the Great Commission, to make disciples as you go through everyday life.

How do you serve your "calling" from God? **#2:** It depends greatly on the *spiritual gifts* He has uniquely given you. If you have the gift of evangelism (or evangelist), you are on the front line: You have the supernatural gifting to confront others and introduce them to Jesus, even if they are strangers. We looked at spiritual gifts in the previous chapter.

Your personal mission field is your social network: friends, relatives, neighbors, people at work or school. You already know them. Those who are functionally unchurched (they never worship) represent your personal mission field. Your social network changes from time to time as new people enter your primary sphere of influence.

As you saw in Chapter Four, you have a spiritual GPS. It defines your holy direction. *Gifts* define how you serve Christ uniquely. Your *purpose*—the "endgame"—is to make disciples. That includes your role of witnessing at the beginning of the process. Discipling is the "on-the-job" apprenticing process of your ministry to others. In the witnessing process, God has given you the power of *story*. Anytime God works in your life, you have one more story. Those stories are not fiction. They are real episodes of God spiritually reengineering your life. You are an eyewitness for the King of Kings! You have experienced His power

yourself. You are an “I” witness, uniquely placed in your niche of the world.

Can you see how Jesus looks at you? Can you catch the way God wants to use you? Can you identify your personal, relational mission field? Do you recognize the power of relationships?

The Powerful Platform of Relationships

For the majority of us (around 90 percent of all Christians), we aren’t going to “evangelize.” It is not our gift. We are not gifted to confront strangers. Yet, we all have a “mission field” of relationships. Most people who are not Christians become believers through *relational influence*. God reaches them through Christians they already know. This strategy works best when we share our God stories. Many Christians—even so-called experts—talk about the power of programs. However, *Jesus’ plan reflects the power of relationships*.

Sadly, most Christians don’t witness at all—ever! Why? After interviewing hundreds of believers, this is what we have discovered. (1) A large percentage of Christians theoretically know they should share their faith, but have confused witnessing with evangelism. They are not comfortable sharing faith like an evangelist. They feel inadequate and are not trained. To be honest, they are afraid. (2) Many others feel sharing faith is the role of pastors and staff. This issue is related to issue number one. They feel incompetent because they aren’t trained like the “professionals.” (3) Some never consider sharing their faith because they have concluded that spiritual witnessing is the role of the evangelism committee, board, or an evangelism program. They might say, “Sharing faith is definitely not for me!” (4) The real issue, however, is that most Christians have never learned the distinction between evangelism and witnessing. They have never understood the difference.

Most Christians have never learned that the *power* of witnessing is in the personal relationships *they* have with other people. Many believers have never learned that sharing faith is all about God stories. They are

stuck on the false notion that they have to be: (1) “polished” speakers who are (2) fluent in theology, who can (3) “argue religion” and (4) quote the Bible by chapter and verse. None of these issues are relevant. They are lies of the enemy. It is time to regain our focus on what “witnessing” actually means. That is what we explore in this chapter.

**Sadly, most Christians
don’t witness at all.**

The Enemy

Witnessing is powerful for God and the Christian movement. Throughout history, every time there is a “revival”—a great move of Christianity—relational witnessing is a big part of the scenario. Why? (1) It represents multiplication, and (2) the Holy Spirit uses the power of relationships. Sharing what God has done in your life is the way most unbelievers become Christians, especially those who didn’t grow up in a Christian family. Donald Miller says, “I believe that the greatest trick of the devil is not to get us into some sort of evil but rather have us wasting time. This is why the devil tries so hard to get Christians to be religious.”² Miller describes “religious” as all the “habits” that prevent your heart from engaging God.

Think about your faith and your heart. You may attend church regularly. That’s great! Does your heart break for what breaks God’s heart? Is your heart broken for the guy at work who shows no sign of faith in God, whose life is a mess?

Do you feel pain and sorrow about the mess of our society? What about mass shootings, the epidemic of drug addiction, the record-breaking number of suicides, the senseless killings, the explosion of electronic porn, half the babies born with only one parent, government leaders who can’t get along enough to break the gridlock? Do you see the spiritual challenge in all this?

**Do you feel pain about
the mess of our society?**

I was asked to preach at a church in Nashville. I was given a text from the Scripture to use as the basis of my message. I never gave a thought about the reference in the text concerning the devil. So, I spoke a few sentences about our spiritual enemy. After the worship service, there was a luncheon. I was asked if I would take questions about the decline of churches in America and suggest strategies to reverse the trend.

One man made a comment, then asked a question I never anticipated. He said, “We haven’t heard a sermon in this church for twenty years that mentioned the ‘devil’—and I’m here every Sunday. Do you really believe that myth?” This phrase came to mind: “When you soar like an eagle, you attract hunters!” Yet, Scripture says, “...those who wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles, they run and don’t get tired, they walk and don’t lag behind.”³ Do you recognize that, as a Christian, you live each day on the front line of a spiritual battleground?

In the New Testament, young Christians constantly struggled with living their faith in a world that was primarily unaware of God’s love in Jesus. Like today, it was primarily a secular world. In the New Testament, young Christians were warned, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”⁴ Yet, this is a subtle enemy. Your greatest apprehension about sharing your God stories is the myth—the lie—that you will fail and be rejected.

It is true: When you share your God stories, you will learn more about this cosmic battle. Does that scare you? It shouldn’t! Actually, it is an affirmation: You have become strategic for God at a greater level. It is also a revelation: The power of Christ *in you* is greater than the evil enemy who is after you—and after those who have not yet met Jesus.⁵

When I think about that “roaring lion,” the devil, I remember the time my son, Jon, and I were in South Africa training pastors. After several conferences around the country, we had the opportunity to visit a wild game reserve. There were some baby lions who had lost their mother. The rangers had them in a cage and were feeding them. I

thought, “They are so cute. They look just like oversized house cats.” The rangers asked if we wanted to hold them. “Why not?” we said. The rangers told us that we had to wear these long, heavy, leather gloves to cover our hands and arms. Honestly, I thought the gloves were a little overkill for these cute little animals.

As soon as we held these baby lions, I realized why we needed the gloves! Even though they were little, these lions were vicious. It became very clear: They are born to kill. And yes, I thought about the devil from a much clearer perspective! Remember, the Bible says, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion.”⁶

There is much evil in this world. Jesus is the solution. As Christians, we pray that evil would diminish. We know Jesus is the real answer. We know He has won the victory. We also realize that many people don’t know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When you share your God stories, you become a strategic, powerful part of the solution. Your God stories are sometimes called “testimonies.”

**Jesus is the
solution.**

William Kumuyi is the leader of a huge church in Nigeria. He shared with me this powerful reminder: “Where there are no tests, there are no testimonies.”⁷ You will discover that many of your God stories, your testimonies, come from times of challenge in your life: your job, marriage, health, or family. You will also learn that once you take on the lifestyle of sharing God stories, *God will connect you with people who have similar challenges*. This is the miracle you will experience. God opens the door for your testimonies, your God stories. It is an exciting reality that will grow your own faith. There are no “coincidences” on the front lines of God’s Kingdom work!

When I’m in my car, I listen exclusively to the Message radio station on Sirius radio. In fact, my annual Christmas present from my wife is my Sirius subscription. If you see me, I’ve got the radio cranked up, and I’m listening to contemporary Christian music.

Some time ago, there was a great song by Jeremy Camp with the words about “the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.”⁸ I recognized it as a passage somewhere in the book of Revelation. Since I’ve been working on this concept of God stories, sometimes called “testimonies,” I decided to look it up.

I’ve heard the phrase before, but I never really thought about what it meant. Perhaps you have had the same experience. What I learned is powerful! Revelation 12:10 says:

“...Salvation and power are established! Kingdom of our God, authority of his Messiah! The Accuser (the enemy) of our brothers and sisters thrown out, who accused them day and night before God.”⁹

So, ultimately, this battle for lives and the eternal destiny of others will someday come to an end. In the meantime, the real question is: How can God use you, your testimonies—God stories—in this cosmic battle of eternal life and death? What does this have to do with you, and with every Christian, as “I” witnesses? How important are your God stories, your *eyewitness* accounts, your testimonies?

Revelation 12:11: “They (God’s people) defeated him (the enemy, the accuser), through the blood of the Lamb (Jesus’ death on the cross) and *the bold word of their witness (testimonies—God stories)*.”¹⁰

The Formula

This is the formula, according to Scripture. The short version: $\dagger + T = V$. $\dagger$ (Jesus’ death on the cross + your T (your testimonies/God stories) = V (victory over the enemy). Imagine that!

$$\dagger + T = V$$

Most Christians are clear: Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. Yet, many believers are unclear: How does that relationship with Jesus

reach the world? *It occurs through the bold word of our testimonies—God stories!* You are partners with Jesus in the greatest rescue mission ever!

You and Jesus, together, are the key “players” reaching those in your social network. Why? So that others can experience eternity with their Creator! If you want to impact those in your social network for ultimate good: (1) Jesus has already won the victory on the cross, and (2) you can share what God has done in your life. This is “the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony.”

Fishing

As one of Jesus’ disciples, *you* have become a “fisher of men and women.”¹¹ God’s plan isn’t just for your pastor and church staff, or for those on the evangelism team at your church. It applies to you. There is an interesting reality about fishing. When you catch fish for food, they die. When you catch people for Jesus, they live. They live life abundantly. They live eternally. That is a really big deal!

Isn’t God’s plan amazing? Isn’t it wonderful that He would include you and me as conduits to change the eternal destiny of others? When you experience the multiplication of this miracle, you will discover the

When you catch fish, they die. When you catch people for Jesus, they live.

power of faith at a whole new level. You could even call this “exciting Christianity.” You can help change the world, one person at a time. You will

experience God at work. You will watch your church grow. You will see your nation change. There is no greater thrill!

God says, “I’m about to do something new. It’s bursting out! Don’t you see it?”¹² The mission to change the eternal destiny of others is not limited to your “church” or “church programs.” It isn’t simply “the job” of your pastor, church staff, or church leaders. It is for you—and for those in your social network: friends, relatives, neighbors, those at work or school. Look at your phone directory. They are there! One of the great

things about the Great Commission is that God works through people like you and me. You don't just know the faith; you have it. Walking the talk prepares you for talking the walk—telling your God stories. You are an “I” witness!

However, you may be wondering: What does a God story look like? Turn to the Appendix: Sample God Stories. They may not be similar to the stories about how God has worked in your life. However, you will get the idea and begin to consider your own spiritual adventure. You will discover, over time, that you have many stories about how God has worked in your life.

**Walking the talk
prepares you for talking
the walk.**

In Chapter Six, we will look at how you can launch a *movement* of witnessing in your church.

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter Five

1. In Acts 1:8, Jesus appeared to the apostles and said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses...” (my paraphrase). Do you think Jesus was speaking only to the apostles? Or was He speaking to all the believers, *just at that time*? Or, was He simply addressing church staff and leaders? Or, was he speaking to all believers? Is He speaking to you, right now?

2. Do you exercise the role of witness? If not, why not?

3. Rate the following roadblocks to sharing faith. How do you score?

Fear of rejection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	No fear of rejection
Limited Bible knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Good Bible knowledge
I think it's the pastor's or staff's job	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Not only the pastor's or staff's job; mine, too
I have little clarity on witnessing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	I'm very clear about witnessing

4. How clear have you been about Ephesians 4 where *all* God’s people do the work of ministry, and church “staff” focus mostly on equipping them?

Not clear 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very clear

5. Have you been equipped to be a witness? How confident are you?

Not confident to witness 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very confident to witness

6. What is your position on the real enemy, Satan? Do you see him trying to disrupt your life? Is he disrupting your church? Is he discouraging your witnessing? Were you aware that the enemy is defeated by (1) Jesus' death on the cross *and* (2) the word of your testimonies/God stories?

Not aware 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very aware

7. Have you ever been challenged to share your God stories? Would you like to be equipped to share your God stories?

Maybe 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very much so!

CHAPTER SIX

Launching a Movement in Plain Sight

Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is due to the triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever achieved without it.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson¹

In Chapter Five, we looked at what it means to be an “I” witness. For those with the gift of evangelism, reaching out to strangers comes supernaturally. It is the amazing gift given to a relatively small number of people in the church. For the rest of us, who have other spiritual gifts, the supernatural element is, likewise, the Holy Spirit. However, for us, God usually works *through* the power of our relationships. Our social connections represent the platform for our God stories. We love and know God. He has worked in our lives. We are “I” witnesses, sharing our real-life God stories.

Believers sharing their God stories represent the explosive potential for the growth of the Kingdom of God. God stories are so strategic, I wonder if the enemy tries to keep us in the dark. We get so busy doing Christian programs at church, we often overlook the untapped power of witnessing to our relational network. Every Christian has God stories to share.

Our world is often troubled. Evil events fill our newscasts daily. The enemy is working hard. He also works on you. He knows the power of God stories. The Bible summarizes how the enemy is defeated: the blood of the Lamb (Jesus' death on the cross) and your testimonies—your God stories. Together, this is the formula that grows God's Kingdom! How important is that?

**Our social connections
represent the platform for
our God stories.**

Jesus calls us fishers of men and women. When you catch fish, they die. When you “catch” people for Jesus, they live! When you share your God stories, you are fishing in the waters of eternity.

What Is a Movement?

This chapter began with a quote attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson. He connected the effectiveness of a movement with “enthusiasm.” Do you know the origin of the word “enthusiasm”? It is the combination of two Greek words: “in God.” Are you enthusiastic about what God has done for you through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection? Are you enthusiastic about anything God has done in your life? If so, you are a potential movement person.

In this chapter, we begin by looking at the movement dimension of sharing God stories. We look at launching a movement of sharing God

**Are you enthusiastic about
anything God has done in
your life?**

stories in your church. It is important to distinguish a *movement* as very different than a *program*. (We briefly looked at this in the Introduction.) Churches

seem to be fixated on programs. What is the difference between programs and movements? Programs are normally short-term and focused on goals that can be easily measured. Movements change people

who impact others over a longer period of time. *A movement becomes a lifestyle behavior with exponential multiplication.*

Honestly? Christians love programs, even though Christianity is basically a movement. Why is that? Programs are in the category of a “quick fix.” However, they don’t substantially change much. Programs are *transactional*. A movement is *transformational*. In the letter to the Romans, Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind....”² Change the way you think!

In my consultation work with churches, I’ve actually met pastors who have initiated a new program every year for ten to twenty years! I ask, “Did these programs substantially change anything?” The answer is *always* the same: “A few people got involved—those who usually get on board. However, it has not changed our church like I hoped it would.” It’s easy to launch a program. What most Christians and churches really need is transformational change, like it says in Romans 12:2—the renewal of your mind. The people God uses to make the greatest impact throughout history don’t just think more. They think differently. *For many believers, God storytelling is a new way to think about themselves and sharing their faith.*

Programs are not “bad,” just very different. Programs in churches are vertical, top-down. The pastor or a leader gets in front of the larger group and uses program “hype” to encourage people to get involved. A few do get involved. Most don’t. In many churches, the invitation to “sign up” comes from the pulpit. If leaders push a program hard enough, they will run people out of the church. Or, if the resistance movement is strong enough, the people push back. They start a movement of their own.

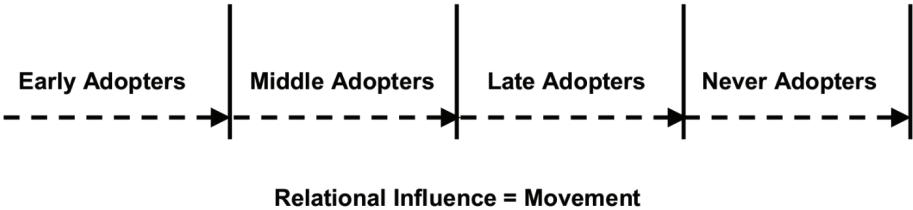
Some organizations or “leaders” manufacture church programs. They make a lot of money. They also *unintentionally* limit many churches—and people. Eventually, word gets around, and they go out of “business” or manufacture the next latest, greatest program. What is the greatest difference between a program and a movement?

A movement is not top-down. It is not superimposed on people. It is a lateral or horizontal approach, even in the launch phase. The most powerful movements occur bottom-up.³ You begin by finding those who are *early adopters*—people who want to grow and help their church go forward. The movement is not a “secret.” Leaders communicate: “Some people are involved to help our church, but there is no pressure if you are not involved.”

Early adopters are a small percentage of any group, including your church. The group most likely to get involved, after the early adopters, are those who are called middle adopters. They will not tolerate “some church leader pushing some program down our throats.” They are influenced through their relationships with those who are early adopters. This is really important: (1) It is *relational influence*, laterally—horizontally, and (2) it occurs almost entirely in the context of relationships. This is a movement. *Christianity is a movement*. Obviously, this takes time. It just works. Jesus launched the largest, longest-lasting movement in the history of the world.

You begin by finding those who are *early adopters*.

The movement continues: Some middle adopters have relationships with those who are in the next category: late adopters. Late adopters are those who, if you push a program too hard, will immediately start an underground resistance movement. Their objective? Get rid of the leaders, including the pastor. They may also start a mass exodus, an underground movement to help members find another church. The Apostle Paul was a late adopter who became a champion for the Christian movement.



Finally, there are “the never adopters.” How do they—if ever—get involved in a movement? First, they have a relationship with someone who is a late adopter. But there is a second, important factor: They have a major crisis event in their life. A challenge makes them more receptive. Movements are God’s most effective way to change your church for the better. Honestly? Programs are easier to “sell,” yet have little lasting impact. They can divide churches. They can become vertical disrupters.

Not all programs are harmful. Some can help momentarily or incrementally. However, they usually do not ignite movement. They are more informational, yet less transformational. There is power in relational influence. That is why Jesus walked this earth.

In Matthew 13:8, Jesus taught about the sower. Some “seeds” fell on “fertile ground,” which grew and multiplied “a hundredfold.” Early adopters are those in the “season” of fertile ground. As they *cultivate* those with whom they have a relationship at church, some of those middle adopters become receptive. This is a movement approach. Movements are slow to get started, as you will learn in this chapter. However, in time, the multiplication is phenomenal. Jesus started the greatest movement in history with twelve somewhat ordinary people.

Movements change the culture. Those involved not only learn something different. They *become someone different*. The results are sustained by those who are “moving.” Again, most programs require leaders and mechanics to keep them going. Programs are transactional: You do this, you get that.

Movements are transformational. Those involved become different people. Programs are high control—structured. Movements are high accountability—propelled by results. Programs are almost entirely taught. Movements are mostly caught, relationally. (You will see that later in this chapter.) *Christianity* is a movement of faith. *Religion* is a programmatic system that directs people to do something. In movements, people are changed and direct themselves. *Faith* is a movement calling you to become someone different. A good definition of a movement is as follows:

A movement is a group of people who are organized for, ideologically motivated by, and committed to a *purpose* which implements some form of personal or social change; who are actively engaged in the recruitment of others; and whose influence is spreading in opposition to the established order within which it originated.⁴

The Role of a Catalyst

Think about God's launch of the Christian movement. God had promised a land to the Israelites, who were in bondage in Egypt. His people eventually landed in what now is Israel. No one was surprised to learn that Jesus was born in the promised land.

Movements are transformational.

However, we should ask, "Why then?" Sure, it was the "fullness of time"—the right time. God's timing is always perfect. Yet, it doesn't always look that way from the human perspective. When Jesus entered this world, the promised land was occupied by the foreign, pagan Roman Empire. There were Roman soldiers marching through the streets. People were petrified—these people invented crucifixion! The Romans taxed God's people, sending their hard-earned money to their emperor, who built a stadium to watch human beings kill each other for sport.

The Roman occupation was a catalyst. The Jews were oppressed and, likely, depressed. Their faith movement seemed to be at risk. Would the cadre of Roman gods replace the one true God of their ancestors? Would the tyranny of fear and disruption ever end?

Disruption, pandemics, and unusual challenges are recipes for receptivity. At the height of the Roman Catholic institutional and biblical drift, God raised up reformers. Those who "protested" became "Protestants," a word designed as a negative, but transformed into a positive movement in history.

Today, many churches that once flourished are aging and declining. The impact on civilized people is chronicled in every newscast. Buildings of dying churches are being sold as breweries, restaurants, or mosques or being torn down for housing developments. Other churches—and whole denominations—are seized by liberalism in a misguided attempt to sync up with the culture. This trend leads to decline and the death of churches. Other church groups react with strict, but dead orthodoxy, fueled by political behavior and legalism. It ultimately results in death and decline as well.

Yet, the religious leaders tried to kill Jesus, but there was a resurrection coming. It's the same way with churches. At Church Doctor Ministries, we continually see churches with wise leaders that request consultation from the outside.⁵ Their challenges are a catalyst for potential renewal. Just as in the Protestant Reformation, a severe challenge from biblical drift leads to the receptivity to recapture the effectiveness of the Christian movement.

As we look at launching a movement of sharing God stories—witnessing—*think about people catching what can't be taught*. It becomes a movement powered by relational influence. It moves horizontally. Those in the movement participate for the rest of their lives and influence others. The key is that they don't *learn* how to witness—do something. They *become* witnessing people. They are witnesses. They live their God stories. They share their God stories as a spontaneous lifestyle. In the Bible, people “gossiped the Gospel.” They shared with *enthusiasm*. They told others about what they saw, what they heard, how they felt, how they were changed, what had happened to them. It was news—Good News—which is the word “Gospel”!

Here's how it works: Take your present age and add a hundred years to it. Where are you now? Where is your car? Your house? Your furniture? Your clothes? Where are all the things you think about, save for, pay for—where are they now?

Measured against eternity, nothing of this world makes much difference at all. Two hundred years from now, it is unlikely that even

one person in the world will remember what you looked like in this life! However, when you share faith, it has an eternal dimension.

Many pastors have been trained as “program directors.” This is not meant as a criticism or an insult, only an observation. If they are part of one of many Christian denominations with leaders, their role models often operate as program directors. That is not all bad. It just isn’t enough to launch the impactful movement called Christianity.

Once in a while, a movement leader comes along. Most of the large churches in the world are led by movement leaders. This doesn’t mean “large” is better. Instead, it explains, in many cases, how their churches reached that size.

Many pastors have been trained as “program directors.”

Some pastors are movement leaders by intuition. Most don’t even know they are movement leaders.

Most denominations began with movement leaders. They were transformational thinkers, movers, and dreamers. A few generations later, many movements are reduced to transactional organizations with layers upon layers of bureaucracy.⁶ Christianity is always susceptible to programmatic religion—until movement leaders arise and refresh.

Movement leaders start slowly and work deeply—with people. Jesus didn’t have a program. He changed a relatively small number of people who changed others who changed the world. And many are still changing the world—all these centuries later. They caught what can’t simply—or only—be taught. They were *transformed*.

The objective of transformational change for witnessing requires *leadership focused on changing culture*. In their book *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Edgar and Peter Schein note: “If one wishes to distinguish leadership from management or administration, one can argue that leadership creates and changes cultures, while management and administration act within a culture.”⁷

A movement begins by building the culture. Culture is the sum total and overlap of five components: values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews. Culture transforms. I have written about this in the book *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*.⁸ As mentioned before, the Apostle Paul warned the church at Rome: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...” The result? “...that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”⁹ The cultural “renewal of your mind” is not just the way you think but who you are. Faith in God moves the cultural needle for individuals and nations. The result is that you desire what God wants. It is called “the will of God.” When you pray the “Lord’s Prayer,” one of your requests is for God to help you to do what He wants—“on earth as it is in heaven.”

You will learn from this God story movement that cultural change takes time and persistence. Consider how long Jesus spent with the disciples. He modeled what it takes to disciple others. Even though Jesus commanded His followers to “make disciples,”¹⁰ it is rare to find a pastor who actually discipled others using Jesus’ model. When you do find such a pastor, you see the Christian movement and significant results. Why? Because those who are truly discipled multiply others who become discipled. *As a Christian, don’t settle for anything less than a movement.*

The Culture Change

How do I know this works? Because I led this movement in a church where I was the pastor. The people didn’t stop the “God story movement” after I left. Those who, for one reason or another, went on to other churches took the movement DNA with them. Movements make lasting impact. They are *infectious*.

You will notice that this effective, long-lasting “God story movement” in my church used no advertising, no fanfare. In fact, I never told anyone what I was doing. I never explained what I hoped to achieve. No one knew, including my wife.

Remember, this is a true story—how I began a culture of witnessing in the church I pastored. To be clear: I’m not brilliant. I just followed what Jesus modeled. It’s so easy and effective, you would think all churches operate this way. But they don’t. Why? I think most churches

**Movements are
*infectious.***

fall into the program trap—transactional change. Why? Because it is faster and *appears* easier. In my perception, most church leaders trust Jesus for salvation, but do not follow Jesus to disciple others into a movement. Why? They think programs are faster—and they are correct! Also, their lives are cluttered with nonessential church stuff, disguised as “important” or “the way we’ve always done it.”

What follows is absolutely essential for a movement. As a pastor, the backstory to our change in the culture of sharing God stories is the one to two years I spent changing the *atmospheric culture* of our church. Like many denominational congregations, I inherited a church where “feeding the members good spiritual food” was the limited atmosphere. That’s not bad—just not enough! Slowly but continuously, *I gently moved the cultural needle to the priority of reaching lost people for Christ.* (I’ll share more about the movement of the cultural needle in Chapter Nine. I’ll explain how you can get this started easily and right away.) What is the signal that the needle-moving transaction became transformational? Most everyone didn’t even realize it occurred! There was one visible exception: Everyone knew our church grew dramatically.

It wasn’t that outreach was entirely absent from the church for the previous 130 years. It was simply never a priority—not anywhere near the top. Jesus gave His life for lost people. He gave His followers the Great Commission. It seems to me that reaching people for Jesus and making disciples should be a big part of every congregation’s culture. The early church, described in the New Testament, reflects that priority.

Tod Bolsinger says, “Culture is the air current that lifts the bird, the water that holds the swimming fish, the background and frame that draws the eye to the center of a picture. It is all unnoticed, taken-for-

granted and powerfully present elements that shape our lives and work.”¹¹

By the way, you don’t have to be Jesus to gently reshape the culture of your church. Nor must you be the pastor, an “elected” leader, a member of a board, or a tenth-generation Christ-follower. A God story culture is like the flu. If you have it and get close to others, some will catch it.

This raises a question: Is all this cultural stuff really that important? It is absolutely essential! It is why Jesus spent about three years developing His disciples before He gave them the mission. He eased them into the mission. If you don’t make the effort and take the time to prepare others with outreach culture, you will change the simple God story movement. You will turn it into a program that is “here today and gone tomorrow”—like most every program. You will substantially change nothing.

Jesus constantly spoke about the culture of the Kingdom of God.¹² Jesus changed the culture of religion into the movement of God’s Kingdom. He used examples like yeast, which is hardly noticeable, yet changes everything. If you develop a culture of outreach, you will experience a lifestyle of using God stories. If you do not focus first on cultural development, God stories will become just another program that “came and went.”

The Witnessing Movement Launch

Once you establish Kingdom culture, starting the God story movement becomes ridiculously simple. However, if it is to become a movement, you must keep at it. It may take longer than a year, but it will work. Why? God wants it to work. Remember, you don’t have to wait for “everyone to get it”—just the early adopters. How do you find them, identify them? That is where the movement begins.

The movement started with those who were early adopters. (We will focus more on this as we look at the SEND Movement in Chapter Nine.)

How did I find them? I targeted those in the Sunday morning adult Bible class I taught every week, right after the worship service. They were familiar with the Kingdom culture because I had taught it to them.¹³ They were the first group approached. There were no announcements or other programmatic gimmicks. I didn't tell anyone what I was doing, as mentioned earlier.

We normally started Bible class this way: I would say, "Good morning." Then, I would take prayer requests, pray, and teach. I had been following this routine for two years. There were about forty adults in the class. There was coffee at the back of the room and some pastries. The tables were in rows with a center aisle. Get the picture?

On "Launch Sunday," I came in as usual and said, "Good morning." Then came the transformational change: "Before I take prayer requests, I just want to ask: *Anybody want to share what God has done in your life since we met last Sunday?* Anybody want to share anything?" You could hear a pin drop! What happened? Nothing!

Stop and think about this movement element. I didn't preach, teach, or buy a program about witnessing. *I asked a question.* This is called *interrogative influence*. It is moving people by asking a question, not by lecturing them. Remember when Jesus *asked* His disciples, "Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am?"¹⁴ Jesus used the power of interrogative influence. So, I did as well: "Anybody want to share what God has done in your life since we met last Sunday?" By the way, Peter answered Jesus' question correctly: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Consider Jesus' amazing response: "On this rock" [testimony] "I will build my church...."¹⁵

The next Sunday, I did the same thing. Nothing. The next Sunday? Nothing. Sunday number four? Nothing. Was I discouraged? No! I was serving as a *cultural architect*. Changing culture takes time—and persistence! Cultural architects know that! Remember? Jesus operated for three years as a spiritual, cultural architect who began a movement. It has lasted for more than two thousand years and continues to change lives! Therein lies your credibility. That is where you find

encouragement. The Holy Spirit provides the power of persistence. So, keep praying, trusting, and asking with the power of interrogative influence and the patience to trust the Holy Spirit.

Stop and think about it. Are you a parent? If so, did you work to influence your children to say “thank you” when they received something? I’m sure Janet and I told each of our two kids to say “thank you” at least five hundred times. We used interrogative influence. We asked, “What do you say?” Today, they are adults—and very good at showing gratitude. You see, if you truly want to change culture—the culture of sharing God stories—you must be persistent. However, the payoff is this: Culture is powerful! Now, both our children are married and have children of their own. They are constantly asking their kids: “What do you say?” Culture is a powerful element. Be persistent! If you can do it for a “thank you” movement for kids, you can do it for a God story movement for your church!

In week number five, I asked the question in Bible class, and we experienced *cultural breakthrough*! Mildred raised her hand. She shared something. It wasn’t profound, but it was ninety seconds of breakthrough that would change an entire church—in time!

Let’s analyze this. I think what happened for Mildred was this: During the first four weeks, Mildred finally came to the conclusion that I was going to ask this question every week. During the previous week, she was conscious of this new way to begin Bible class—this cultural change. Something happened in her life that week, and she remembered to share it in class. *This is a mustard seed cultural event.*

Week six—nothing. Week number seven—nothing. Week eight—two people shared! An event becomes a movement! Fast-forward: After seven months, I had to cut the God stories off at fifteen minutes, or there wouldn’t be time for class. End of story? No way! I began to ask the same questions at our elders’ meetings, church leadership team, women’s and men’s groups, and youth group. We used the question everywhere, except in worship. Why not worship? This is an outreach

The Amazing Power of God Stories

strategy, not a worship activity. However, while preaching, I would share some of my own God stories.

After eighteen months, we began to see evidence of our members sharing God stories with unchurched people *outside* the church. How did I know? Some of those who heard the stories were coming to worship! We finally reached the God-story-culture goal!¹⁶ It was an answer to prayer!

We never talked about witnessing, yet many in our church were doing it! They were modeling it to each other. Our church began to grow. In the following years, our church grew to four times its original size. We had to add more Sunday school space and another worship service. The growing crowds required more parking. We began developing a strategy to plant a church in a neighboring community. In the Kingdom of God, this is *not* exceptional. It is normal—or, it should be!

In Chapter Seven, we look at another important ingredient for sharing God stories: “Where do you start?”

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter Six

1. Dream for a moment. What if everyone in your church operated as a witness, sharing God stories 24/7? What do you think would happen in the life of your church? What if just 50 percent of those in your church gained the lifestyle of God stories, living as a witness of God's presence? Sketch out what your church could look like. Think about the impact on your community—and the changed lives for eternity. Is that worth investing the time to develop?
2. When farmers plant a field, they have already cultivated the environment with a lot of “groundwork.” They have sprayed to kill the weeds, prepared the planter, and purchased the fertilizer. And way before that, perhaps they conducted a soil test. Are you prepared to spend one or two years preparing your own spiritual soil? Are there those in your church—early adopters—who would be willing to prepare and cultivate the spiritual soil of your church? Who would be on the list? Would you?
3. Do you know how to identify the early adopters? They will include some of those who are always involved—but not all. How will you encourage those who are “ready”? How will you cultivate those who are not? How will you avoid turning the invitation into a program? Will you tap the power of interrogative influence?

The Amazing Power of God Stories

4. When your church increases in Kingdom culture and people discover their spiritual gifts, some will become witnesses in six to twelve months. Would you like to see that in your church? If so, what are you going to do about it?
5. One of the differences between a culture of witnessing and a program is the continuing development of your church’s lifestyle. Do those in your church focus on developing the cultural dimensions?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All the time

What could you do to foster more of that Kingdom culture?

6. You read how I started the cultural change in our church. I began focusing on reaching the lost and growing the Kingdom. There are some who think I don’t like any and all programs. Actually, I don’t care one way or the other. I care about results. Do you think that is important to Jesus? On the “results” meter, how would Jesus rate your church for reaching the unchurched? Now, what grade would your church get from Jesus? A, B, C, D, or F? Be honest! Now, what is your strategy to improve?

7. With this approach, Christians in your church “catch” the witnessing culture. It is not the way you catch a ball, but how you catch the flu. Does your church model a discipling approach? Or, does your church only drop packaged programs on people? Can you change that? How would you do it?

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Platform of Relationships

If your house is on fire, and you've called the fire department, forget the jewelry, your wallet, the wedding album, but grab your phone. The most important value to you is your directory—your network.

—John Maxwell¹

In Chapter Six, I shared the true story of launching a witnessing movement, encouraging others to share their God stories. I was the pastor of the church and started the process with the Bible class I taught. Before that, I laid the groundwork for Kingdom culture by teaching, training, modeling, and, perhaps most important, one-on-one discipling with key influencers. In short, I raised the consciousness about reaching others for Jesus. That emphasis is important for “refreshing” the mission of every church, every Christian, every week. My effort wasn’t forceful. It was a soft, gentle, and continuous focus.

What if you are not a pastor and don’t teach a Bible class? Can you start a movement? Absolutely! Are you a parent? Ask your children at the dinner table: “Did God do anything special in your life today?” This is a subtle way of discipling your children. You could be launching an eternal movement—a way of life. It could continue beyond your lifetime!

Your children may follow your model to their children. This is Christianity as a movement. *You can move the movement!*

Are you part of a small group of Christian friends who meet regularly for fellowship or Bible study? You can begin a movement with them. Do you teach a Sunday school class? Do you work with the youth at church? Are you part of your congregation's women's or men's group?

You can move the movement!

Move the movement! Use the Seven Questions for Discussion provided for each chapter. You can introduce the idea of a discussion group by sharing the sample God stories in the Appendix.

What is the point? A movement of sharing God stories begins among those who already *share a relationship*. If you don't have a group of Christians who gather together, perhaps you should start one. The mutual support and unique dynamics of Christian friends are powerful. They also offer a platform to grow a God stories movement. All you have to do is ask, "Anyone want to share what God's done in your life since we got together last time?" Focus on listening well.

Encourage each person to invite their friends to your small group. If the group gets too large, divide into two groups. Just keep inviting others who are receptive. Move the movement!

If you "cultivate" the atmosphere with Kingdom culture thinking beforehand, others will be more receptive to start sharing their God stories. Cultivation increases the likelihood of results. Keep it simple. Don't make it a structured program. This is a relational process. Most importantly, be persistent. Persistence is not a license to be belligerent or pushy, or to make people feel guilty if they aren't ready to share their God stories. Just keep gently asking the question: "Anybody want to share what God has done in your life since the last time we were together?"

The concept of asking a question is powerful. Jesus did it with His disciples. Remember from the previous chapter when He asked them

two questions in a row? He said, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” Then He asked, “Who do *you* say I am?”² He could have just lectured them. However, Jesus understood the unique power of questions. You can do this!

We lecture—“force-feed”—people often in church and sometimes at home with our kids. It’s not wrong to teach. But sometimes a question is gentler—and that is the powerful point. *Interrogative influence* is teaching softly—with questions. Changing behavior works really well with a question. You can double the questions: “Anybody want to share?” and “What has God done in your life lately?”

Social Network

In this chapter, we look at the most powerful *context* for witnessing: relationships. It isn’t the only platform. There may be times when you share a God story with those who are not in a personal relationship with you. But most often, sharing God stories works best among those you know.

When it comes to sharing faith, most Christians express discomfort about “talking to strangers.” That’s normal, unless you have the spiritual gift of evangelism. Sharing something personal, like your faith, can be scary. Sharing your God stories with non-Christians works well when you have a relationship. Why? They are in your social network. It works even better when you learn the *factors of receptivity*.

Remember when Jesus asked His disciples to pray for workers? He started by pointing into the distance: “Look at the fields. The harvest is large, but the workers are few.”³ You might jump to the conclusion that Jesus was going to lay a guilt trip on the disciples. Sometimes, in our enthusiasm for outreach, church leaders do that: “Look at all the people going to hell,” implying: “If you don’t do something, it’s on you; it’s your fault.” That

**Sharing your faith
is scary.**

is negative motivation. It doesn't work very well. And, it is not the way of Jesus.

What Jesus says next is brilliant. Take these words seriously: They are very intentional. Jesus says, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He would send workers into His harvest fields."⁴ Jesus simply asks His followers to *pray*! Most Christians would sigh relief and say, "Pray? I can do that!" Later, we'll come back to that concept.

Don't overlook the idea that the harvest is "large." This means there are many people out there in the "field" of this world, your world, your social network, who are *receptive*. There are more receptive people than most Christians could ever imagine. Sometimes we meet a person who is up to his neck in problems. Some issues are circumstantial, and some

Jesus simply asks His followers to *pray*!

are of our own doing. We all know people who have gotten themselves into trouble. If you have ever participated in ministry to those in prison, you know the truth of what

my friend Neil Cole says: "Bad people make good soil—they are up to their ears in fertilizer!"⁵ The seed of faith can grow quickly and dramatically!

Of course, you don't have to be in prison to be receptive. Remember what you learned earlier about the waiter/waitress ministry? Also, do you recall the approach where you ask others what they think life will be like for their grandchildren? It is not difficult to find a "ripe" crop. You need to change the worldview that says, "Most everyone is resistant to God and a personal faith." It is NOT true!

When Jesus asked His followers to pray, a miraculous event occurred. Praying for others molds *believers* into receptivity. I can't explain it, except as a "miracle of God." It's amazing! Jesus says, "Pray for the workers to go into the ripe fields."⁶ What He didn't say is this: "By the way, don't be surprised

Your personal mission field is in your pocket!

when the Lord of the harvest answers your prayer for workers and the answer includes you!” That is what happened to the disciples, right?

So, how should you be praying? Who should be on your prayer list? *This is where the power of relationships intersects God stories.* You already know for whom you should be praying: God has put you into a relationship with them. They are the unchurched people in your social network today and those God will connect with you in the future. Your primary and personal mission field is the unchurched people on the contact list in your phone. It’s amazing! The disciples could never have imagined. *You carry around your personal mission field in your pocket!*

This is where church programs or staff-driven ministry come up short. I’ve consulted hundreds of congregations in seventy-eight different denominations, as well as nondenominational and independent churches. Most of them are heavily program-oriented. It is the vertical approach: top-down, force-fed programs. We have activities for the “church” to reach lost people. The Great Commission is often translated: “Go make disciples of all ‘nations.’”⁷ However, the word is actually “peoples.” We say, “Let’s reach this city for Jesus,” implying we take the city—as a city—for the Christian faith. That implies *we* do it as an institution called “church.”

**You can’t
disciple a crowd.**

It doesn’t work that way. You can’t disciple a crowd. Jesus worked—full-time—for three years, with twelve. He lost one and ended up with eleven. And that was JESUS. He worked with them one-on-one and in very small groups. We, in the church, want to go big and move fast—like you can fast-track disciples? However, as David Kinnaman said, “Discipling is hard work.”⁸ It is horizontal. The platform for the Kingdom of God is relationships. Relationships are never a quick fix, never a program. It’s all about people. The Christian faith moves as a movement: horizontally.

So, begin praying for those who show no signs of a connection with Jesus. These are people with whom you already have a relationship. They

The Amazing Power of God Stories

are your personal mission field. They are those with whom you connect socially. They are your friends, relatives, neighbors, those at work or school.

What should you pray? Pray that your relationship will intersect with their challenges, problems, needs, tragedies, and hurts. *Disruptions and needs represent your moment of opportunity to share your God story.* Timing is important.

In Scripture, there are two words for “time.” In the New Testament Greek, *chronos* means “it’s 5 p.m.,” or “I’m early.” *Kairos* means “the Lord’s timing”—the moment when God is working and wants you to go to work! Your objective? Join God where He is already working, moving, and blessing. Farmers plant seeds, fertilize, and water. God makes the crop ripe. That is when you harvest. It is called *receptivity*.

Another helpful dimension is the way people encounter challenges or opportunities. They open the door for you to share your God stories. When I was in mission school, we were taught about the “excluded middle.” Life has three levels of concerns. The top level deals with the meaning and purpose of life. It is the academic or philosophical level. Preachers often focus their sermons on this area, in one way or another. At the bottom level are issues that deal with how to improve life: better education, more fulfillment through a better job, health maintenance issues that are not critical, paying off the mortgage, planning a vacation, and figuring out ways to get along better at work.

The “excluded middle” includes the daily crises of life: chronic or fatal illness, serious injuries, death of a loved one, divorce, bankruptcy, a surprise pregnancy, a parent diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, severe weather calamities, a family loses their house in a fire, or a pandemic—all life-changing events. If you study Jesus’ miracles, this middle category is most frequently His focus for life-changing ministry. Watch for it everywhere, every day. The Holy Spirit is active in ordinary people who are in crisis mode. Expectant prayer is an essential aspect of the Christian faith and life. Expect God to respond. When you share with people in these circumstances, you are demonstrating that God still acts in our

lives for our welfare. God delivers in the midst of suffering. These are opportunities for you to share your own God stories with those who have experienced serious calamity.

Do you want to be effective in the use of your God stories? Then learn these three tiers of issues. Ask the Lord to put you next to the unbelievers in your social network at just the right time—when the harvest is ripe. Diagnose the severity: Is the issue top tier, bottom tier, or in the middle? Ask God to give you recollection of a somewhat similar instance in your life when He got your attention, brought you closer to Him, or made a difference in your life. Share your God story.

Once you become comfortable with this approach, you will discover the amazing opportunities God will give you—to be at the right place, at the right time. Now, let's expand this to everyone in your church.

How large is the immediate, collective harvest field for your church? Add up the unchurched non-Christian relationships in the social networks of the active people in your congregation. This is your greatest opportunity—your first level of mission. They represent the “low-hanging fruit,” the “harvest” that is most available. Why? They are in your sphere of influence, by relationship. Do you think that person at work, someone you feel you “just hit it off with,” is an accident or a gift from God? Relationships are powerful “harvest” opportunities. Are they in your daily prayers?

Sociogram Prayers

Have you ever seen your church identify your mission target? It represents your congregation's harvest field. Church leaders should cast vision by identifying that target. Targets provide focus and define strategies.

Unfortunately, many church leaders define their harvest field (mission field) as “our city” or “our county.” Sometimes they will draw a circle around the church, represented by a pin on a map. Other churches also draw on a map, with boundaries that represent twelve

minutes driving time from the church—which is a greater distance if the church building is near a major highway. You know what? Before I learned about mission strategy, I actually did that myself, using a map.

Then I studied about missions. I learned what you need to know. When the church building is the target—the pin on the map—you make the church building the primary destination. When you make the church the destination, you make church programs the strategies. The most popular strategy? Bringing a person to church. What’s wrong with that?

In today’s secularized mission field, non-Christians don’t want to come to church. Why would they attend a service where the goal is to worship a God they don’t yet believe exists? *The building is not God’s destination.* Christ is the destination—a relationship with Him. What is God’s harvest tool? It is people like you. The conduit is relationships. They represent God’s powerful platform for outreach.

What is the strategy to share Christ and make disciples? You are!

**Relationships are
God’s platform for
outreach.**

Every Christian is God’s strategy. What is the approach? Begin by identifying those in your social network who show no signs of knowing Jesus as their personal Savior. That could include those who have fallen away from “church.” Perhaps they joined the church but never joined a relationship with Jesus. Those in your social network who are far from God represent your personal mission field. *A church building doesn’t have a personal relationship with unchurched people, except through the cultivated relationships of its members.*

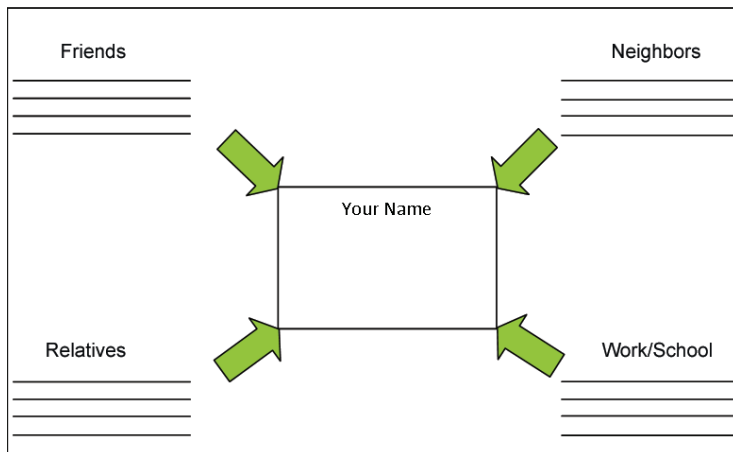
Some people are more relationship-oriented. Others are more goal-oriented. My wife is more relationship-oriented. So is our daughter, Laura. They are both excellent teachers. I’m more goal-oriented. So is our son, Jon. We lead stuff. Yet, Jon is more balanced toward relationships than I am. For me, developing a relationship with non-Christians requires discipline. No big deal. Discipline comes from the word “disciple.” A heart for Jesus and His mission fuels the disciple, even for goal-oriented people like me.

Focus is important. Everyone needs structures to help focus on mission. I carry a card in my shirt pocket every day. It reads: FDM: Focus + Discipline = Momentum. I learned this from one of my best friends, Mick Woodhead, in Sheffield, England.

**FDM:
Focus + Discipline =
Momentum**

Another great focus tool is following Jesus' strategy to pray. As we already learned, He said, "Pray for the harvest." A helpful tool for prayer focus is a sociogram.¹⁰ It is a simple piece of paper, turned horizontally. In the middle, you put a rectangle. In it you put your name. In the four corners you put lines for listing names. For each set of lines, you draw an arrow from the lines toward your name.

In the upper left corner, you list the names of unchurched friends. In the lower left corner, list relatives far from God. At the upper right, list those neighbors who show no signs of faith. At the lower right, list those who seem far from God at your work or at school.



Post this sociogram where you will see it every day, like the corner of the mirror in the bathroom where you get ready each day. Pray every day for these people. Watch for significant life events: death in the family, change in job, empty nesters—any challenges. These are significant opportunities to share your God stories. Ask God to bring

them to faith. Don't be shocked if He gives *you* the opportunity. Also, don't be discouraged if He uses someone else. Rejoice! Your prayers are answered!

As you interact with unchurched people, whether it be every day or once a month, look for signs of receptivity. When you get into a conversation, ask God to give you memory of some God stories from your own history that somewhat match what the person is going through. Connect with them at the level of their feelings about what they are experiencing. This is how “the church” moves beyond the realm of institution to the power of relationships. This is how you take the faith from vertical program to horizontal movement. This is what Jesus modeled!

Do you remember the words of Jesus after Peter said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”? Jesus said, “You are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it.”¹¹ What is that “rock” upon which Jesus builds the church? It was Peter's *testimony*, his God story about Jesus Christ, the centerpiece of his life.

This is the movement dimension of the church. It is not about a building or a program. The movement grows through people sharing their God stories. The church is always on offense, not defense. This is how Christ builds the church—through people like you. This is how the Christian movement grows.

**The church is always
on offense.**

Your Church's Mission Field

If you count the unchurched people in the social networks of everyone connected to your church, they would represent your congregation's *immediate* mission field. If you compared that number to the average worship attendance at your church per week, it would surprise you greatly. Think about it. What if every person had five

unchurched relationships? For every one hundred people, your immediate mission field would number five hundred people! If your church is small, say twenty people, your mission field would be one hundred people. If, by witnessing to the people you already know, you reached 20 percent of your potential mission field, your church would double in size! Most importantly, heaven would grow by twenty people for whom Christ gave His life.

Your God stories are the rock, the solid foundation on which Jesus builds His Kingdom. In the power of the Holy Spirit, hell can't do anything to stop it. Never forget the power of relationships. Watch for receptivity. Hope is the key that unlocks the unbeliever's heart. Prayer—for lost people in your social network—energizes your God stories. Be persistent and loving. Be patient and kind. Be faithful and share what God has done in your life. God will bring the harvest!

Remember, a person can become a baby Christian at any age, even seventy years old. After you share your God stories, what are the first

**God will bring the
harvest!**

steps to take when a person begins to respond with signs of faith? What do you do? What shouldn't you do? We'll look at that in Chapter Eight, "Don't Feed a Baby Steak!"

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter Seven

1. How does your church define your closest mission field? Your city? Your area of the city? Twelve minutes of travel time from your church? Five miles from your church? Or the sum total of unchurched people in relationships with the total active members of your church? How often is this last category communicated in your church? If that number is not 10, what can you do to change that?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All the time

2. Many Christians define the platform for reaching the unchurched as “the church building.” So, the strategy is usually given: “Bring them to church.” Think this through. How does that differ from the platform of relationships? What percentage of emphasis does your church place on each platform?

Church building/activities at church: _____%

Relationships: _____%

3. Jesus said, “...send workers into the harvest fields.” That is where the crop is ripe. How much do you know about receptivity factors? How much does the leadership teach about receptivity? To what degree does *your church* consider your harvest field as those who are functionally unchurched in your social network? _____%

4. To what degree do *you* consider your harvest field as those who are functionally unchurched in your social network? _____%
5. Will you remember the important uniqueness of a *kairos* moment (the Lord’s timing)? Will it help you look for where and when the Lord is working, moving, and blessing? What about the three tiers view of your personal mission field? Are you sensitive to the excluded middle, the crises in the lives of those in your social network (or in your neighborhood) who are unbelievers? Are you ready to respond with your God stories?
6. Jesus said, “*Look* at the harvest fields.” How much are you an *eyewitness*—watching for receptivity among those who are unchurched in your social network?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 All the time

Will that change in the future? When? *How?* How much?

7. Have you heard of the sociogram—where you list those in your social network who are functionally unchurched? Will you use it in your personal life? Will you encourage its use in your church? Do you think it will enhance your prayer life?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Don't Feed a Baby Steak!

Beware of posing as a profound person—God became a baby.

—Oswald Chambers¹

In Chapter Seven, we focused on your primary mission field: the unchurched people with whom you have a relationship. Your primary mission field consists of your friends, relatives, neighbors, and those at work or school. When they are under stress or challenged, they are often most receptive. If it is a life crisis, they are in the “excluded middle.” They are those who are likely showing significant signs of “readiness for harvest.” They are potentially “ripe”—receptive. You and I don’t make people receptive—God does. Why? He wants to rescue them for eternity. How? He wants to use you.

Jesus taught His followers to pray for workers to go into the harvest. As you pray, don’t be surprised when the Lord chooses—and uses—you in answer to your prayers! You can focus your prayer on those in your social network by using a sociogram. It identifies those who are in your arena of relational influence. They represent your personal and primary mission field.

The Amazing Power of God Stories

The *immediate* mission field for your church is the sum total of unbelievers in the social networks of those who attend your church. If each person in church has five “prospects” in their sphere of influence for every one hundred people in church, your immediate mission field would be five hundred people!

Yes, the harvest is “large,” according to Jesus. However, He says, there are few workers. So, Jesus says, “Pray for workers.”² Christians pray for many needs. Many pray regularly for their pastor, staff, and the church’s mission. Do you know many believers who pray specifically for workers for the harvest? How many are praying for the unbelievers listed in their phone directory? Is that priority frequently encouraged in your congregation?

The disciples were asked a question by Jesus: “But who do you say that I am?” It was Peter who answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”³ That was a confession of faith from Peter. It was a testimony—a God story. It was Peter’s God story. Jesus responded, saying that on Peter’s “rock-solid” confession, He would build His church. He is still building the church today. It is not simply about another institutional program, but the God stories, “confessions,” of how Jesus changes lives. Nothing can stop this movement of faith when it is shared with others. This is your confidence!

The Next Step

In this chapter, we explore the sensitive, powerful, and important next step. When you share your God stories with a receptive unbeliever, the Holy Spirit works through you. This process may take years or minutes. The seeds of faith germinate at different times, depending on the soil—the person God loves. It depends on their *receptivity*. At some point, a person “lets go” and allows God to take over.

**The Holy Spirit
goes to work
through you.**

The Scripture says a person is “born again.”⁴ That person becomes a child of God.

Do you have children? Before our children were born, we took birthing classes. My wife made it through the birth process well, without medication. As a helper in the process, I went through some sort of culture shock! It was an awesome experience. I’m so glad I could be there. Did I help? Not so much!

I soon discovered the reality. You bring the baby home, and your life is forever changed. You are a parent until you die. It seems we missed the reality of that in the class on parenting. We also discovered hundreds of challenges that aren’t in the “manual on parenting,” which, of course, doesn’t exist! How do most parents live through this?

Most parenting is caught, not taught. If you are fortunate, you catch it from your parents. If you had good parents, you learned a lot about what to do. If you had parents who were not so good, you learned what not to do and perhaps picked up some pointers from your friends’ parents.

As you share your God stories, you witness another kind of supernatural birth. That’s why Scripture says that when a person receives Christ, he or she is “born again.” When that occurs, some Christians, unfortunately,

Most parenting is caught, not taught.

hand the spiritual baby off to the church. However, since the church is usually a much bigger group, it’s like dropping your newborn off at the local high school. We often want to rush them into a “membership class.” Most of the time, that is premature—perhaps even counterproductive!

If God is using you—and your God stories—as the vehicle to introduce a person to Jesus, that is a miraculous milestone. And you, all along the way, are what some call a “Godparent.” That’s not simply someone who “stands up for the person” when they are baptized. Think of it as a spiritual parent raising a young Christian. Remember: That

young baby Christian may be any age. Even those eighty years old are young in faith.

In this chapter, we focus on nurturing young Christians. The first mistake is often getting them into worship. *Most people—of any age—as new Christians aren’t ready for worship.* You’d be a better “Godparent” to invite them to lunch, coffee, a walk in the park—anything but a church service!

**Most new Christians
aren’t ready for
worship.**

The Right Approach

I know, *it sounds like heresy*. However, most Christians get it wrong.

Believe → Behave → Belong

If you want to be effective in reaching unchurched people, you have to switch the steps in the process. Most Christians—and their churches—operate with this spiritual parenting model: believe, behave, belong. This is an *organizational approach*.

First, you have to believe. With an organizational approach, we rush baby believers into a worship service. Then we urge them to take a membership class. After a while, once they are taught the “right beliefs,” we expect them to behave a certain way. This includes regular church attendance, Bible class—and, depending on the church, the list may continue: “our” dress code, no alcohol, no smoking, become a volunteer—and don’t forget tithing—the list goes on. This is an unbiblical description of “minimal perfection to *get in*.” The last step in this approach is “to belong.” We put them through some ceremony. When it comes to being “fishers of men and women,” we demonstrate that we prefer catching fish that are already cleaned.⁵ It is an organizational model.

It seems quite clear from Scripture that your model should follow a *spiritual parenting approach*: belong, believe, become.

Belong → Believe → Become

Belonging is not a reward or a luxury. It is in our spiritual DNA.⁶ Worship is a form of *spiritual culture shock* for a baby Christian. *You don't feed a baby steak!* Those who have been far from God are now taking baby steps toward Jesus. Your role is to nurture the relationship. Your position, beyond “neighbor” and/or “fellow worker,” now includes “spiritual nurturer.”

You don't need a theological education or superior Bible knowledge to nurture a young Christian. Most of all, you need to be a Christian friend. At this point, your own stories of faith and a willingness to listen—and take the time to do it—are your greatest resources. Even your mistakes in life will help your new (or searching) “baby” Christian know that this journey is *real*. Christianity is not a fairy tale! Your young Christian wants a friend. Why? More than anything, she wants to *belong*. (We'll look at a mechanism for this when we focus on SEND Centers in the next chapter.)

**Your young
Christian wants a
friend.**

your mistakes in life will help your new (or searching) “baby” Christian know that this journey is *real*. Christianity is not a fairy tale! Your young Christian wants a friend. Why? More than anything, she

In the nurturing environment of belonging, the faith—the “belief” part of the formula—blossoms. *Belong* grows into *believe*. You can enhance this growth by inviting a few other Christians to a meal with you and your new Christian. Be sure to invite the rest of the new Christian's family—whether they are believers or not. As a “fisher of men and women,” this is called “extending your net”—as in network.

***Belong grows
into believe.***

Including other family members avoids one of the greatest tragedies of church life. Do you know anyone in your church who attends worship, but you never see their spouse? Or you see them with one of their children, but not the rest? It is one of the many pitfalls of the

organizational approach. One person from a family is ready to *believe*—and we throw them into a worship service before another member of their family is ready.

However, if you invite your brand-new Christian to dinner or a picnic in the park, the response potential of other family members rises significantly. Beginning with *belong* recognizes that *belonging is the most important and powerful dimension* long before *become* ever begins.

“Belonging” is usually a process of baby steps that takes some time. My British friend Mick Woodhead describes it like moving a huge, heavy door. You open it a crack and put in a wedge. You move the door again and move the wedge. “Belonging” is not a quick-fix event. It’s a process.

What is the first thing nurses do with a newborn baby? They put the baby in the arms of the mother, where the two bond, skin to skin.

“Belonging” is usually a process.

Likewise, baby Christians need to know they belong. You, as someone who already had a relationship with the person, are literally the “belong mechanism” God uses best—not a worship service, your church staff, a class, or the church building. Doesn’t that make sense?

Once a person *belongs* and grows into the *believe* area, they begin the lifelong journey of *become*. That phase never ends. It is a process that lasts an entire lifetime. Behavior changes. One of the *become* factors is worship—of course. Discovering one’s spiritual gifts is another important step. Another should be Bible study. Attending a membership class would be yet another. Becoming a member, joining the church, would be another behavioral step. The most important part of the process, *become*, is often missing in the journey of most young Christians. It is called discipling. Without discipleship, the Christian movement is crippled!

Discipling

Jesus never said, “Go, make church members.” Becoming a church “member” is an important part of belonging. However, the greatest, most important part is discipling. It is central to Jesus’ movement. He said, “Go, make disciples.”⁷

The honor and privilege of making disciples is not given to the organization of the church. It is not a “big-group thing.” Preaching is very important. But preaching does not make disciples. No one can disciple a crowd. Preaching grows people who are disciples to become better Christ-followers. *The most effective person to disciple another is the person who began the process by sharing a God story.* That is you!

Don’t panic. It is not that difficult. Actually, it’s fun. In addition, it is likely one of the most rewarding investments you can make in another person. It is the thrill of spiritual parenting. When Jesus said, “make disciples,” He was not just addressing pastors and church staff. He wasn’t simply speaking to a church board or committee. He was speaking to you—and to every believer.

How does discipling work? As new Christians *belong*, then *believe* and begin to *behave*, you help them to discover their spiritual gifts. They can take a reflective survey that will help.

When Jesus said, “make disciples,” He was speaking to you.

Or you can ask them to join you for a spiritual gifts workshop like Your Spiritual DNA Workshop.⁸ You can help them work through an implementation guide about spiritual gifts, *Your Spiritual Gifts: Discover God’s Plan for Your Life*.⁹ Their spiritual gifts will determine areas of ministry—designed uniquely for them by the Holy Spirit. Then you introduce them to Christians who serve in that area of ministry. They will disciple them into service. You have disciplined them and grown them as new Christians. Now, Christians who have gifts like theirs will disciple them into ministry. Today, discipling might be called “apprenticing”—learning while doing. It is on-the-job equipping.

The discipleship process has six steps: (1) You find someone who has a similar spiritual gift mix—one who is involved in a ministry using

Six Steps of Discipleship

1. Invitation
2. Observation
3. Involvement
4. Engagement
5. Leadership
6. Challenge

those gifts. This step is the *invitation*: “Will you come with me as I do ministry?” (Jesus modeled this. He said, “Come follow me.”) (2) The next step is *observation*: “I do while you watch.” (3) When the time is right, your disciple experiences *involvement*: “I do, and you can help.” (4) In the next step, the roles of discipler and the disciple are switched. This is the level of

engagement: “You do; I will help.” (5) The next step is the level of *leadership*: “You do, and I watch.” (6) The final step is the *challenge*: “Now you are trained. You pray about and look for someone to disciple and follow the same process. As your discipler, I will do the same.”¹⁰ This is what Jesus modeled. It is what He had in mind when He said to all Christians, “Go, make disciples.” This is the primary objective of Christians and churches. This process changes the world, one person at a time. Yet, it is not a process of addition, but of exponential multiplication. *Christianity is not an organization. It is a movement.*

Notice, once again, this is not the institutional approach. This is the way “church” is supposed to operate. Pastors and staff—those with leadership positions—don’t simply do ministry; they “equip God’s people for the work of ministry.”¹¹ They help believers discover their gifts and find their ministries—their place in the body of Christ. Everyone in the congregation shares “God stories” among those in their social networks and relationally nurtures them to become disciples. This represents a healthy, biblical church.

Christianity is not an organization. It is a movement.

In the process of discipling new Christians, you will encourage new believers to be part of an ongoing Bible study. This can be at church. However, it usually works better in a home or somewhere else. It is not supposed to be a “step” in their spiritual development as a young Christian. Instead, it becomes a part of their Christian lifestyle. Babies don’t live on milk alone forever.¹² Your God stories are that “milk,” along with the basic introductory aspects of the Christian faith. However, babies grow into children and take on solid food. This is the Bible reading and discussion phase that lasts a lifetime. Why would you ever stop munching on Scripture? It is a lifelong activity, just like eating. The Bible is spiritual food.

Your unique relationship to those who begin the Christian journey is important. Your God stories give you a unique honor and special credibility. You will continue to be that person’s spiritual “mother” or “father.” You will always have influence in their life. What happens if that person slips away from their active church life? Who should visit them? You? The pastor? Both?

**The Bible is
spiritual food.**

It is a privilege to be used by God as a conduit to nurture a new person into faith. It also comes with responsibilities. It is not a momentary relationship. It should last a lifetime. If the church relegates that relationship to staff, as the church grows, there will be new Christians who could fall away in great numbers. A handful of staff simply cannot respond. They don’t have the time or unique relationship. But the members can get it done! It’s not your job. It is your privilege, by Jesus’ design!

That is the value of multiplication. It is God’s master plan. It is actually the Master’s plan! And you get to be a part of it! If you have experienced parenthood, you know the miraculous experience of giving life to another generation. You likely know about the effort involved with babies. There is a lot of hard work—even inconveniences, like a diaper changed in the middle of the night when you’re exhausted. Yet,

most parents wouldn't trade the experience for anything! Think about your God stories. The Holy Spirit uses them to change the eternal destiny of your spiritual children.

Have you ever visited Colonial Williamsburg? It is one of my favorite places. The people there have reinvented colonial life. In public, they never leave the characters they represent. If you ask them about airplanes, they just say, "I don't know what they are." I once asked one of the leaders of that colonial village, "Have any great leaders in the history of the nation been born here?" He said, "No, they all started out as babies."

Your God stories change the eternal destiny of your spiritual children.

We all start out as spiritual infants. We all travel on a journey. Through our God stories, God moves people toward eternity. It is a humbling thought. Some of these people will outlive us on this earth. Some of them will accomplish more for the cause of Christ than we could dream or imagine. It is easy to share God stories. Honestly, it's hard work nurturing those spiritual babies. Yet, it's worth every minute we invest.

Consider what it will be like when, in eternity, someone comes up

We all start out as spiritual infants.

to you and says, "Thanks. It's because of you that I am here. God used you. And, I am, *literally*, eternally grateful." How does everything you ever did, anything you ever owned, whatever you've achieved, compare to that?

In Chapter Nine, we look at the area where you live as a primary mission field and focus on how much our world has changed. We will explore how Christians can adapt to it. We will focus on the concept of holy discontent and take a close look at a generation of young people who have chosen to exit the church. We will also consider the powerful middle-step mechanism of SEND Centers.

The Amazing Power of God Stories

5. Do you find it challenging to take “baby steps” with a brand-new Christian who is sixty years old but a spiritual toddler in the Kingdom of God? Why?

I am not challenged	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	I am very challenged
------------------------	----------------------	-------------------------

6. Does your church teach you a “next-step mechanism” in which new Christians can develop relationships during early “spiritual childhood,” before they are ready for worship?

Never	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Yes, all the time
-------	----------------------	-------------------

Can that process be improved? How? What would you suggest?

7. Have you ever followed the six steps of discipleship with another person?

A little	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	It’s my lifestyle
----------	----------------------	-------------------

If you have, what has been your experience? If you have not, are you ready to try it? Where? With whom? When would you start?

CHAPTER NINE

Adapt to the Mission Field in Your Backyard

I am convinced that a major reason we do not discover God's vision for our churches is that we are content with business as usual. Vision must be fueled by a holy discontent with the status quo.

— Dan Southerland¹

In Chapter Eight, we experienced what happens when the Lord uses your God stories to “birth” a new Christian. Some might be eighty years old. However, in the spiritual life, they are baby believers.

Most churches try to feed these babies spiritual steak! It's like taking your newborn to McDonald's for hamburgers and fries. It might be described as a spiritual form of unintentional child abuse. For a brand-new Christian, at any age, worship can be a dose of culture shock.

Christianity is an adventure in spiritual growth. It is a process. Most people grow by taking “baby steps.” It occurs after a person is “born again.” You don't want to enter a new believer in the marathon of institutional church life. Spiritual growth and maturity should be a gentle process.

The best person to nurture a baby Christian is you—the person God used to witness through your God stories. Like physical babies, new Christians need attention. God used you, as a person of faith, to share your God stories. You are the most logical person to nurture that “baby” in Christ. God has blessed you to be a “Godparent.” You are much more than a *spiritual storyteller*.

It sounds like a lot of work, doesn't it? Yet, what if every person in your church discipled only five to ten people in their entire life and, as the church grew, new believers discipled only five to ten? Project this process out to fifty years and do the math. Subtract half—those who moved away. Your final answer would blow your spiritual mind away!

**You are much more than a
spiritual storyteller.**

In the previous chapter, we also looked at the *organizational approach*. It is often believe → behave → belong. This formula includes, as an early step, attending worship. After that comes a membership class. However, the Scripture reveals a much different, relational, approach. The *Scriptural approach* is belong → believe → become. It leads to discipleship.

This makes your approach as a spiritual “parent” more meaningful. The Christian approach is relational. “Belong” comes first. “Believe” is a response to your real God stories. “Become” includes spiritual gifts discovery and discipling into a ministry calling. The discipling growth process includes both invitation and challenge, with several important steps in between. Jesus practiced this. As an invitation, He said, “Come follow Me.” As a challenge, He said, “Go, make disciples.”

The Changing World

In this chapter, we begin by looking at your present reality. As you share your God stories, it is helpful to remember that today's spiritual environment has greatly changed. Not only that: The rate of change has

changed. Change has accelerated through technology. Communication has reshaped our existence. When my wife, Janet, and I lived in Australia, we had one mode of communication we could afford: mail. The technology for “rapid” mail was a blue tissue paper airmail envelope. We learned about the death of my wife’s grandfather two weeks after his funeral.

During our eighteen months “down under,” we never spoke by phone with any of our American family or friends. I know, it makes us sound “ancient,” even to ourselves! It is a good reminder of how much the world has changed so quickly. This change doesn’t impact *what* the Bible says. However, it does require Christians to retool the delivery system for God’s Good News.

Rapid change has produced both benefits and challenges for every Christian and every church. Electronic screens have done away with hymnbooks in many churches. Most people love it. Some hate it. Others simply miss the old way. Overall, our world has changed in ways that greatly challenge believers. The decline of the Christian movement gets our attention. It reflects many of the reasons why we must change the *way* we share God’s unchanging message.

I’ll never forget it. On Christmas Day 2018, I caught a newscast while shaving. The reporter shared: “Seventy-two percent of Americans say, ‘Religion is important.’” He quickly added, “But church attendance continues to decline.”

As I shared in the Introduction, a Gallup poll in the spring of 2019 asked Americans, “To what church are you affiliated?” Fifty percent responded, “None.” In 2021, Gallup reported that less than half (47 percent) said “yes” to the question, “Do you happen to be a member of a church, synagogue, or mosque?” What does that mean for the value of what you are learning about sharing your God stories?

Our research at Church Doctor Ministries indicates that the institutional church is struggling to *adapt* to this changing world. It’s not the *content* of the faith that is at issue for Bible-based congregations. It is

the *delivery systems*. Biblical beliefs may remain strong for many. But the delivery systems for many churches are out of touch. It is common for churches to have a powerful gift in a worn-out container. Thankfully, there are many notable exceptions.

Unfortunately, some Christian groups have chosen to keep the delivery system, but “water down” the truth of Scripture. That is a sure formula for disaster. History has already proven that fifty years ago, when some denominations chose to “sync up” with the changing culture. They developed a message that they perceived was “culturally popular.” Today, those denominations are near extinction.

It is both faithful and practical to guard the content of the Christian faith. To remain effective, the Christian movement can never change God’s Word—the truth. However, since the birth of Jesus more than two thousand years ago, that unchanging Word has been carried by interactive, continually changing delivery systems. When you hold strong to the *content*, it is an act of *faith*. When you hold onto the *containers* as if they are sacred, it is an act of *religion*—or *idolatry*. The medium does send a message.

Sharing God stories is more than a delivery system. It is being a *witness*—something Jesus said Christians would be. The way to be effective in the Christian movement is to adhere to biblical thinking and focus on adaptive strategies for delivery. These strategies do not alter the content of the faith. When you feel you are in unfamiliar territory, you discover: What used to work doesn’t work anymore. You must adapt to new realities.

When you hold strong to *content*, it is an act of *faith*.

Jesus’ greatest challenges came from the “religious” leaders, the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus made it clear to them, “New wine needs new wineskins.”² Jesus was an *adaptive* leader. Today, Christians must be adaptive—wherever the faith has lost ground.

Each year (excluding the peak years of COVID-19) we take a group of North American Christians to England. Most of them know that the church in England, for the most part, has dwindled dramatically—like the rest of Europe. Great cathedrals are primarily tourist attractions throughout that part of the world. However, there are a few hundred churches in the U.K. that are thriving! These congregations are alive with packed-out worship services. They are filled with on-fire young people and quite a few reenergized older believers. These churches are multiplying churches. They are vibrant specimens of the Christian movement!³

Christians must be adaptive.

These churches have remained strong on biblical content. They have developed adaptive outreach strategies. They represent a dramatic contrast to most of the churches in that region of the world. Each year, we meet with the leaders of these churches. They have become our dear friends. They are pioneering leaders, about twenty years ahead of North America. Why do we expose North Americans to this movement? *Spiritual culture is more effectively caught than taught.* These churches represent a living classroom of the future for North American churches.

When you share your God stories, you are practicing an important element of what it means to be an adaptive Christian, an effective witness. What you do, however, actually dates back to the New Testament. Yet, it is “new” to much of the Christian world today. Then you discover how far the mission dimension of the faith has drifted. How ironic!

Adaptive Christians

As an effective Christian in a place where so many churches are declining, you can help change the direction. How? (1) Again, you will first respect the *substance* of your faith, based on Scripture. (2) You will assess the effectiveness of your church. Is church attendance increasing or decreasing? How long has this trend continued? Are you reaching

new, younger generations? (3) Are you making disciples, or simply gathering a crowd? (4) Are you willing to get help from the outside—experts who can “see the forest and the trees”? Make sure they understand the biblical uniqueness of the church. Good church “consultants” conduct a thorough analysis of every aspect of the church. They interview a wide range of people in your congregation and provide specific, written recommendations for your congregation. They also help by providing follow-up with your church leaders. They continue the working relationship. (Otherwise, there are few substantive changes.) (5) They will help you generate an openness to biblical, strategic changes in the systems God uses to improve the health and growth of your church. (6) They will guide you to foster an outreach attitude among others in your church.

Or, are you a person who “knows it all”? Based on results, Jesus is the most powerful, impactful person who ever lived on this planet. Yet, His basic demeanor was that of a humble servant. You see it at His birth in a stable. He rides a donkey into Jerusalem. Most of all, His willingness to suffer and die on the cross for people like you and me says it all. Humility is a badge of character.⁴ Ironically, the higher you place yourself, the further you are from heaven!

As an adaptive Christian, if you want to be effective, watch out for quick-fix programs. There are many, and they appear appealing. Jesus changed the culture of the faith. He continually called it the “Kingdom of God.” He clarified: “My Kingdom is not of this world.”⁵ Kingdom culture focuses on your values: what is important to you. Jesus’ culture emphasizes beliefs. Where you place your faith matters a lot. In what do you *really* trust? This Kingdom of God is about your attitudes—your posture toward others, the role of your church, the world, God Himself. Jesus’ Kingdom is about priorities. What comes first? What is most important? The Kingdom of God is a worldview: how you see the world, how you understand the way the world works. Your Kingdom culture

Jesus was a humble servant.

and the culture of others are what ignites—or diminishes—the power of your church. It determines whether your church is an asset or a liability for Kingdom and mission effectiveness.⁶ Have you ever thought about that? Are you, personally, an asset or a liability to the Christian movement?

Your best opportunity to react to this changing world is to develop strategies that move God’s Kingdom forward. Become a *movement*

**Are you an asset to the
Christian movement?**

person. Avoid the quick-fix program. Focus on the long-haul strategy of developing people for God. If you listen to Jesus’ stories, they are about preparing the soil, the *medium*, for the message. You plant seeds for the harvest.

Jesus taught about this harvest, a metaphor for making disciples. Several years ago, I was in San Jose Succotz village in the rainforest of Belize. This little place is world-famous. It was the home of Don Eljio Panti, who, in the years 1892 to 1895, became globally famous as a “medicine man” and botanist. It was his grandson who told me about the many medicines he discovered from the plants and trees in the rainforest. Don Eljio talked about soil. His grandson shared: “I cannot see why people today do not understand that the soil is like a bank account. You must put in and wait for the ‘interest’ to grow before you start making withdrawals. Who has a bank account where you only withdraw and never deposit?”⁷

Spiritual life is like the soil. It requires cultivating, fertilizing, sowing seeds, weeding out invasive elements, and patience—waiting for the harvest. Developing a culture of sharing God stories in your church is a process.

If you are going to develop ways that reach others for Jesus, you will change the way you think about the church. Think of the church building as the “barn.” Harvesting does not occur in the barn. It takes place outside the barn in the fields. The mission is centered “out there,” not in the barn. Most church people are exhausted by barn-based

activities. Jesus' approach is to equip and send people on a mission to the harvest.⁸

Early Adopters

You may recall in Chapter Six, I referred to moving the cultural needle. Earlier in that same chapter, I referred to the concept of early adopters. In every movement, including Christianity, there are those who lead change. They might be called “innovators.” They are “ready now” for change and innovation. In the case of many churches that have suffered from mission drift, they are the first to step forward in a renewal effort. Early adopters are not the majority of any movement. The largest segments of people are middle adopters and late adopters. At the other extreme are a small group of never adopters. They may be the last to accept any change. However, as the name implies, some never change.

When Jesus appeared and started His ministry, John the Baptist and some of his followers were early adopters, as were the twelve disciples. Some of the Pharisees who lobbied for Jesus' crucifixion were never adopters. Paul was a never adopter who, on the Damascus Road, became a late adopter and apostle.

How do you identify those who are early adopters in a church? One way is to discover their level of “holy discontent.”⁹ It may surprise you, but in many congregations, our research indicates that many, 40 to 50 percent, of the active members have holy discontent. These are the first Christians who will learn to share their God stories. They are the first believers God will use to bring renewal to your congregation. Do you see? God is already bringing renewal, long before we knew about it! When this occurs in numerous churches, God has the critical mass to bring a revival to your area of our world. It begins with those who have holy discontent.

Holy Discontent

Does your heart break for the same things that break the heart of God? Jesus lived, bled, and died for the world of lost people. He was discontent with the unrighteousness of so many. He chose to die for them. Will you choose to live for them?

If you live for them and care about them, God may have already given you an infectious dose of holy discontent. It's not a disease. It is the pathway of spiritual renewal

Jesus chose to die for them. Will you choose to live for them?

toward congregational cure. Are you discontent that Christianity is losing its grip on the nation? Are you uncomfortable with the spiritual loss of most of a generation of young people?

When you look in the mirror, who do you see? Do you see yourself as a missionary? A missionary doesn't always have to cross the seas, only to see the cross—then go where God leads. Of course, there is a mission field “over there.” You also shop, play, drive, and work on the mission field where you live.

One of the teaching exercises we use when we work with churches is about the concept of “missionary.” When we teach at a church, we ask the people to raise their hands if they know a missionary personally. A few hands go up. We ask, “Tell us about the missionary you know.” Each person responds. Almost always, they give the name of a career missionary working in some foreign mission field. Then we say, “We want to introduce you to another missionary you know personally. Go home and look in the mirror and say, ‘I am a missionary.’”

The word “missionary” comes from the word in Scripture translated “to send” or “sent.” Jesus said, “As the Father has *sent* me, even so I *send* you.”¹⁰ The missionary you know best is the one you see in the mirror. Jesus says “go” and make disciples. What do we usually do? We invite people to a church service: “y’all come” (the Southern American

version). The only focus on “come” from Jesus is, “Come unto me....”¹¹ When you do, He tells you to “go,” make disciples.¹²

**You can learn how to
be a missionary.**

You can learn how to be a missionary without going to mission school. Anyone can learn to be a missionary! The resources are available!¹³ If you have holy discontent, you have heartburn for those who don’t know Jesus. If you don’t have holy discontent, I pray that you will catch it—right now! My prayer for you is that you want to share your God stories with effectiveness. You want to see others equipped with this mindset: “I’m a missionary, too.”

Young Adults: The Lost Generation

While Christianity has lost millions of young adults, there are still many who have a heart for God. But guess what? Most of them are not interested in attending a Bible college or seminary to become a “pastor.” There are many reasons for this. The training is expensive, and the pay, when they finish, is often not the best. They will either find scholarships or have a large debt for most of their lives.

There is yet another reason that ministry is not a career choice for many young adults. Most churches are declining. Who wants a profession as the “captain of a sinking ship”? Further, if young adults actually research Bible colleges and seminaries, they discover that many do not train graduates to be missionaries for the mission field where they live!

Consequently, in the coming years, there will be a huge shortage of pastors for churches. Churches will be scrambling to replace the growing number of retiring pastors, which continues to grow each year. This shortage is God’s way to get our attention and to develop adaptive strategies.

God has raised up a new approach to provide for His Kingdom. SEND North America for young adults is patterned after an effective training mechanism in England. In North America, SEND is a ten-month mission training adventure with on the ground, boot-camp-type equipping. SEND is a mechanism for young adults to become missionaries in their own country.

**God has raised up a new
approach to provide for
His Kingdom.**

The SEND young adults, eighteen to twenty-nine years old, get teaching in all aspects of Christian and church practices as well as mission and outreach. There is both classroom and on-the-job, hands-on outreach equipping by experts in various forms of outreach. SEND is a discipling effort for young adults.¹⁴

The SEND graduates are “high-value assets” for growing the Kingdom of God. Some SEND graduates follow the career path of their choice. They become members of churches and help guide others in effective, everyday mission lifestyles. Others are led to work full time in ministry. They are in high demand among churches that want to reach out to unchurched people. SEND graduates demonstrate that “the best person to reach young adults for Christ is usually an on-fire Christian young adult.” They help churches reach out effectively to younger generations. They are experts at sharing their God stories.¹⁵

SEND Centers

From the SEND North America Movement has come a key “middle-step” approach, as you share your God stories. They are called SEND Centers. When you share your God stories, God will bless you with harvest results. What is the next step, since worship may be “too much, too soon”? Consider developing SEND Centers. (This is not to be confused with the training for young adults called SEND North America.)

**SEND Centers are
spiritual incubators.**

A SEND Center meets in a home, park, restaurant, or coffee shop—anywhere “out in the world.” They are “middle-step mechanisms”

for growing new Christians who have responded to your God stories. They are “spiritual incubators” for those who are just beginning to grow in faith. Remember, most new Christians are not ready for worship in the church.

How do SEND Centers work? It’s simple. A group of church members agree to develop a SEND Center. They gather together and share a meal or snacks on some regular basis. It is to this gathering that church members invite new Christians (rather than to a worship service or adult membership class). The invitation is to join you for a fun time with some friends from your church and other guests. These gatherings are a *relational environment* to invite new, growing Christians or those who show receptivity or interest. Relationships are the most powerful mechanism God uses to fuel His movement. Relationships are the key for God stories. Likewise, they are the strategic mechanism for new Christians to grow in faith—especially at the beginning.

It is much easier for these new Christians to have fellowship with a few of your friends from church than to experience the spiritual culture shock of attending a worship service. New, growing Christians are more likely to attend and bring other members of their families who may not yet be on a spiritual path. (Be sure to invite them!) These other family members have a good time and usually want to return for another visit.

Most congregations rush new Christians into worship and unintentionally isolate them from other members of their family, as mentioned in an earlier chapter. How many people do you know who attend church without their spouse or one of their children? The SEND Center strategy works to fix that.

What happens in a SEND Center? Your SEND Center leader helps everyone introduce themselves. The leader may pray over a meal (if you have one), thanking God for “new friends” who are present. You eat

dinner, or have light refreshments, and have great fellowship. Your new Christian (with whom you shared your God stories) meets other Christians. Of course, there may be other new Christian guests who are brought to your SEND Center by members of your church.

After the meal, you allow a few minutes for other members of your church to share short God stories of their own. Your guest discovers you are not the only one experiencing God in your life. A church member (or several members) can read a short section of a modern version of the Bible, and the group can talk about it. Make the atmosphere comfortable and nonthreatening for your guests. You may have a discussion about faith as a follow-up to a God story. Be sure to keep it relational and spontaneous rather than prepared and academic.

If your group has met several times, you may choose to watch the video series *Alpha*. It is likely the most popular and effective introduction to Christianity in the world.¹⁶ After you watch it, break into small groups. One of your members in each group can read the discussion questions *Alpha* provides. Remember the key objectives: (1) relationships and (2) God stories.

Another great resource to introduce new believers to Jesus is the highly acclaimed video series *The Chosen*, directed by Dallas Jenkins. It is a masterful approach of introducing Jesus through the power of story. It is popular all over the world, and each episode stimulates great discussion to help inquirers grow in their faith.¹⁷

You can also play the game *The Gift*.¹⁸ This is a fun way to learn more about faith in Christ. This interactive, small-group approach is another easy way to help new Christians grow in biblical faith.

If your SEND Center gets too large, split up. As new Christians are ready, invite them to worship. *Bring* them with you the first time. Be sure to sit with them. After the service, introduce them to other members of the church and to the pastor. Remember, relationships are powerful! As they assimilate into the church, help them learn to share their God stories. Urge them to start a SEND Center themselves.

Can you picture this? For every two hundred people in worship at your church, you could eventually have four SEND Centers scattered throughout the community. Think of the multiplication for the growth of God's Kingdom!

As a final step, ask the leaders of your church to investigate the SEND Movement. It is a thirty-six-month learning process to equip Christians to become missionaries to their social networks.¹⁹ Remember, those who have holy discontent are your early adopters. God will use your church to experience exponential growth.

The early adopters will grow spiritually by being involved in the SEND Movement. They will grow missionally. They will grow your church. These early adopters will influence their friends at church who are middle adopters. Middle adopters will challenge their friends who are late adopters. This is a movement that will transform your church. Your church will be one of those God will use to ignite a revival in the land.

In Chapter Ten, we will explore how you share your God stories with those from other cultures and the way in which your outreach can bridge to other cultural communities in your area. You will explore how your church's SEND Centers will bridge the cultural divide that unchurched people often experience.

Seven Questions for Discussion

Chapter Nine

1. Do you have adaptive leaders in your church, at any level? How would you recognize them? Are you one of them? Will you become one of them?
2. Do you think you have holy discontent? Can you name others in your church who might have this type of spiritual restlessness as well? How might you involve them in sharing their God stories? How would you identify others who have holy discontent? Would you consider taking the surveys to learn more (see endnote 9 from this chapter)?
3. What do you think about defining your church's mission field as the sum total of unchurched relationships of the members in your church? How could this concept imprint your outreach? How would it impact the members of your church—to pray regularly for those in their social networks who are unchurched? Would you ever consider a twelve-day “spiritual growth adventure” dedicated to experiencing the life-changing movement occurring in England? Who would you invite to go along?

The Amazing Power of God Stories

4. Can you name young adults, ages eighteen to twenty-nine, in your church who would be potential candidates for SEND North America training? Could you find them by digging deeper among the families in your church? Would you encourage them to consider SEND North America training? What do you think it would look like if these young adults were to return to your church as members with the SEND North America training? What kind of impact would they have on the entire congregation? Do you think they would reach other young adults? How would that change your church?

5. Are there people in your church who have had any training for the mission field where you live? Can you name those in your church who might be interested to learn from the video series *The Damascus Road: Where Christians Become Missionaries*?

6. What do you think about the concept of SEND Centers as middle-step opportunities to gently introduce non-Christians to the faith in the safety of a home, coffee shop, restaurant, or park? Did you know that when the Scripture talks about “the church at Jerusalem,” it likely means Christians scattered all over the city, meeting in numerous homes or public venues? What would be the advantage of introducing new believers through a gentle approach at a location outside the church building? What would be the disadvantages? Have you ever taken the Alpha course? Do you know about the impact it is having around the world? Have you heard of *The Gift*?

7. Do you think the complexity of mission issues today warrants a “coach” to help your pastor, church staff, and leaders navigate the mission field that you are now on? Would it be a benefit to have a skilled partner in ministry who coaches leaders in the work of your church? Have you ever thought about how online mission coaches will become more valuable as the number of available pastors continues to decrease?

CHAPTER TEN

Closing the Culture Leap

...disciples cannot be mass-produced. Disciples are handmade, one relationship at a time.

— David Kinnaman¹

Chapter Nine focused on adaptive leaders in the church who recognize when a nation becomes a secularized mission field. Many of the *popular* methods and strategies are no longer effective to reach and disciple people far from God. Many of those approaches originate from corporate and secular models rather than biblical origins.

The message of faith never changes, but the delivery systems must be effective. Christians are not on a mission merely for exercise. Our goal is to see “fruit.” We want what Jesus desires: people who are changed eternally by Him. That is the “harvest” described by Jesus.

If you have holy discontent, the Holy Spirit has placed a spiritual restlessness in you. Why? To help you and your congregation’s ministry become more effective in reaching others for Jesus. Your discontent reflects that you are an early adopter—one who is eager to learn and put into action effective ways to reach people for Jesus.

Relationships are the powerful platform for growing God’s Kingdom. They are more effective than a worship service, programs, or the church building. Younger generations are more relational than their

parents or grandparents. They can be a great asset to help your church become an effective mission in your community. Wherever there has been a great move of God, there has been a parallel youth movement. In fact, Mary and Joseph and the disciples were likely young. Most were probably in their twenties.

In Chapter Nine, we also looked briefly at SEND North America, the ten-month boot camp training for spiritual formation, discipleship, and mission. This training is designed specifically for young adults. Encourage young adults ages eighteen to twenty-nine to consider the life-changing experience of SEND. These young people become “high-value assets” for the Kingdom of God. Whether they end up on staff at a church or simply remain members who attend your congregation, they will strengthen your mission outreach potential. These young adults are trained missionaries, well positioned to reach others in their generation and beyond. Sadly, many churches have lost the ability to attract younger people. These SEND young adults will help your church regain them.

Church members can be trained for outreach to their social networks through the video series *The Damascus Road: Where Christians Become Missionaries*. Missionaries are not only those trained professionally to live and work overseas. They include Christians who are trained and equipped in the tactics of mission in your community. To go deeper, the SEND Movement trains those in your church who would become trained “missionaries” without leaving your church or their jobs and homes. A handful of trained SEND Movement Christians will help you turn your church “inside out.” Your church can become a mission platform to reach the vast number of people who are lost or lapsed Christians. They include those who have never been Christians and those who have fallen away from the faith of their youth. These efforts equip church members to be missionaries. The result is a mission movement in and through your local church.

SEND Centers were introduced in the previous chapter. They are launched by groups of church members who are willing to open their homes or to meet in restaurants, coffee shops, or parks. Christians invite

unchurched guests. They build relationships and share God stories. They will use the video introduction to the Christian faith called *Alpha*. They may also use *The Gift* or use the video series *The Chosen*.

Remember, some of the most enthusiastic and mission-minded members of your congregation are those who sometimes want baby Christians to run the spiritual hundred-yard dash. They want to immediately invite them to a worship service or a membership class. If some are ready, that is great.

However, in a secular nation, infant Christians often know very little about worship. In fact, what they have seen about faith on television or in movies may be negative input. Rushing a baby Christian (of any age) into worship is like asking a newborn to drive mom home from the hospital. It is way too early for that!

Yet, what happens when most unbelievers meet Jesus? We invite them to a worship service. It is like the little boy who noticed the plaque at the back of the church with all the names on it. He asked his father, “Who are these people?” The father replied, “Those are members of the church who died in the service.” The boy then asked, “Did they die in the early or the late service?” As Christians, we don’t want new believers to die in the worship service!

You might wonder, “Well, when I was a kid, I remember that our family regularly attended church. My parents made us sit with them. We made it through that experience.” Today the world has dramatically changed. The Christian movement has stalled. A growing number of people are non-Christians. They are not baptized. They didn’t attend Sunday school or Vacation Bible School as a young child. They have no Christian memory—there is no time in their lives when they remember being a Christian. It was in the 1970s that the U.S. was identified as the third largest mission field in the world, behind China and India. Both the U.S. and Canada are like many other nations: highly secularized. Many people are second- and third-generation non-Christians.

SEND Centers provide a middle step for new Christians. Instead of the leap from non-Christian to worship service, SEND Centers nurture new Christians—of any age. This protects young Christians from spiritual culture shock. SEND Centers also provide an opportunity for the new Christian’s family to come along, even though they may not yet be believers or show much interest in spiritual matters. SEND Centers provide an “incubator” for young Christians and an entry point for others in their family who don’t yet know Jesus as their Savior.

Many churches have rushed one receptive family member into worship attendance, leaving the other members behind. Christians, in their eagerness to move quickly, have often split families further apart. A SEND Center acts as a growth platform for new believers. It is an opportunity for everyone in the family to be gently introduced to Jesus. This middle step helps new Christians and unbelieving relatives avoid spiritual culture shock.

Christianity: A Different Culture

In this chapter, we focus on the uniqueness of the Christian movement. It is important to recognize that Christianity is a *different culture*. Jesus called this culture the “Kingdom of God.” It is the way He began many of His parables, God stories told to the disciples. He also said, on several occasions, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” This culture didn’t come naturally from the world around us. It came supernaturally, in Jesus. This is why, when unbelievers become Christ-followers, they begin the lifelong journey into a different culture. To superimpose that culture in one “dump” on a new believer is insensitive and uncaring.

**Christianity is a
*different culture.***

A worship service, in any form, is filled with Kingdom culture elements. And, that is appropriate! However, for many brand-new Christians, it is too much to swallow culturally. There is no evidence in Scripture that Jesus used, approved, or even considered a fast-track

approach that leads to spiritual culture shock. Otherwise, He would have spent three months with the disciples rather than three years. During those three years, the transition for the disciples was 24/7/365!

Kingdom culture has five elements, as mentioned earlier.² Values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews are the DNA of spiritual culture. When people become Christians, they are different people. God occasionally changes a person miraculously in an instant. Most often, however, they grow as a disciple for the rest of their lives. If it was otherwise, there would be little need for preaching messages and Bible studies.

As a missionary, you are sensitive to the culture of each person you meet. Once you grasp Christianity as the culture of Jesus, you become sensitive to the growth process and nurturing required to “disciple” a new believer. Jesus spent three years. How long are you prepared to grow and nurture a new Christian?

For those who grow up in a home of practicing Christians, the cultural growth process is assimilated over years, through a thousand points of influence. Children in a Christian home hear and see hundreds of God stories. Normally, the five elements of Kingdom culture change slowly, yet dramatically, over time. Christian growth is a slow, careful, loving process. Rick Warren says, “God can bring good out of the worst evil. Not separately or independently. The events in your life work together in God’s plan. They are not isolated acts, but interdependent parts of the process to make you like Christ.”³

Christian growth is a slow, careful, loving process.

Culture can also be described as ideas, customs, skills, and arts. Your culture drives the way you think, your actions and reactions.

These elements grow over a long period of time. In the period of life when a person is a non-Christian, much of the culture is dramatically different than life as a believer.

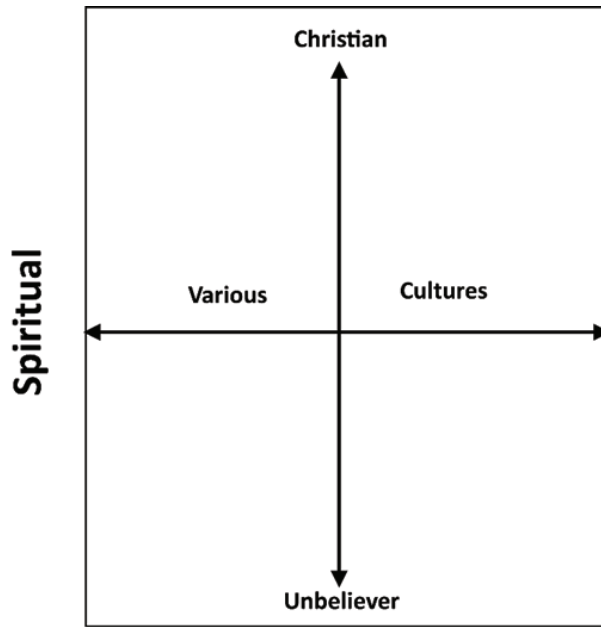
As a Christian working with new Christians, you will be sensitive and move slowly. You want to be kind. This is one way of defining the Christian act of discipling. By contrast, if we rush people into worship “like everybody else” and then into “membership,” we run the risk of growing *minimal* disciples. In truth, some churches are filled with “baby” or “teenage” Christians—and it’s not their fault. *It is the system.* As part of the “church” process, leaders continually “beg” church members to get involved in a Bible class. The results are minimal. The stages of the system are not in proper order. Why does this occur? Many Christians are fixated on the church as “organization.” Jesus was focused on discipling. The difference is huge for the Christian movement.

We run the risk of growing *minimal* disciples.

The Culture Complexity

We live in a multicultural world. Wherever you work, attend school, shop, or attend a sporting event, you will likely meet people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Sensitivity to culture can help you share your God stories effectively. The Holy Spirit is multicultural! At the same time, many of the heartaches, challenges, and difficulties of life bring the same pain—and validity—to your God stories.

Think of culture as a matrix. On the vertical spiritual axis, there is “unbeliever” at the bottom and “Christian” on the top. On the horizontal axis, you have all the different human, secular cultures. The vertical axis gives meaning to life. The horizontal axis gives variety, complexity, and uniqueness to life.



Human Variety and Complexities

On the human plain, there are a wide variety of cultures. If you are an Anglo and like to eat at the Mexican restaurant, you are a cross-cultural “foodie.” Isn’t God’s creation awesome? There are so many slices of human culture! For example, here are a few: There are African Americans, Latinos, Caucasians, Native Americans, Chinese Canadians, and many more. Another cultural slice includes elderly, middle-aged, twentysomethings, high school teenagers, and infants.

Mixed with both of these slices is another: There are the wealthy, super wealthy, middle class, upper middle class, lower class, and some are homeless.

To make it more challenging, you can be a middle class Chinese high school student. This is a mixture of several of the dimensions that make

culture even more complex. Each one of these cultural nuances has its own customs, language styles, ideas, skills, dress codes, habits, and arts.

Another slice of culture includes North Wisconsin Norwegians, New Orleans French Creole descent, Texans, Florida “Crackers,” Indiana “Hoosiers,” and many more. Even more complicated, you can be a North Wisconsin Norwegian who is a new member of an Arizona retiree culture!

It gets more complicated. Some in each category are married. Others are single, never married. Some are single, but divorced. Still others are divorced and remarried.

In an additional complexity of this cultural mix are those who are NASA engineers. Others are Hollywood film industry workers. Still others are migrant workers, not too far from those in Hollywood. Close to those who are migrant workers are Silicon Valley techies. And nearby, you will find retired Midwestern farmers.

What is the point? The Bible says in Christ, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus.”²⁴ That includes all those slices of culture named above. However, it is important to recognize exactly what Scripture says: As *Christians* we are “...all one in Christ Jesus.” There are no prejudicial or human distinctions on the vertical axis, *at least in theory!* In truth, new, baby Christians are not there *yet*. That is also true of long-term, baby Christians who have not grown each year for fifty years, but one year, repeated fifty times!

However, *before* becoming a Christian, the walls and barriers of cultural distinction are still there for many. Only as Christians *grow* *spiritually* do they become “culture-blind” in the good sense. This demonstrates another outstanding benefit of SEND Centers as a middle step of outreach and an environment for sharing God stories. It is the opportunity to develop relationships in a small

All are one in Christ.

group. Remember, relationships are powerful! This cultural sensitivity is part of what Jesus embedded in the Great Commission.

The Great Commission

My colleague and fellow Church Doctor consultant Barry Kolb once said, “A great commitment to the Great Commission makes a great person, who makes a great church, that makes a great community, that makes a great world.”⁵ It is like the bumper sticker that reads, “God bless the whole world. No exceptions.” That includes everyone in your social network—those for whom you are praying, those God has placed in your life. Don’t you think?

**Relationships are
powerful!**

The Great Commission in many English translations says, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” However, as we know, the Great Commission is actually more precise about the word “nations.” That precision has a lot to do with the biblical, strategic approach of missional outreach. It also underscores the tremendous benefit of SEND Centers and the middle-step approach.

The original language for “all nations,” when translated from the Greek, looks like this: “*Panta ta ethne*,” which means “all the ethnics.” You likely understand this: The strategic approach for discipling the world is not to target “nations” as if one strategy reaches all those within a political boundary. Instead, Jesus’ words provide an approach with more precision. His directive is more sensitive to the uniqueness of different cultural backgrounds. *This is why God stories told in the powerful context of relationships are so effective.*

In the study of mission, called missiology, the most accurate English language translation of “nations” might be: “all the different people groups.” “Making disciples” is the standard strategy—which Jesus modeled. *How* you approach a person from their unique people group

perspective is to be respectful of, and sensitive to, their unique distinctions.

Here is an example. Shuhei came to the U.S. to study at a university and stayed with our son and daughter-in-law, Jon and Esther. (Shuhei's name is pronounced like the English words

Jesus modeled: Be sensitive to unique distinctions.

“shoe hay.”) Shuhei quickly learned that Americans often greet one another with a handshake. He may have seen that in Japan through Western television and films. When I met him, he was trying to be sensitive to my culture, so he extended his right hand. We shook hands. However, what Shuhei didn't know is that I had been to Japan several times teaching pastors. I know how the Japanese greet one another. You've probably seen it in the media. They bow. I've done it so much in Japan, I know the important distance between people, what to do with your hands, and the proper angle of the bow. So, after Shuhei's gracious handshake, I backed up two steps, brought my hands together near my chest in the right spot, and bowed to the right angle. Shuhei lit up with this culture-sensitive gesture. We became instant friends!

That is a visual example of reaching out to people and understanding “*Panta ta ethne*”: the people group approach for Christian outreach. However, there is more to this story about Shuhei. As several months went by, Shuhei and I drew closer together as friends. I wanted to learn all about his city. We discovered that I had actually preached in a church (with an interpreter) about two miles from Shuhei's home. It is a small world! It is (also) culturally complicated!

In our family, we all hug each other a lot. Even our son-in-law's parents and our daughter-in-law's parents hug us when they visit. I

Understand the people group approach for Christian outreach.

watched Shuhei observe this. I chose to go to the next step. One day, I gave Shuhei a hug. We had reached a new level! In case you don't know this about Japanese

culture, hugging is very rare. In fact, Shuhei told me, “My father has never hugged me.” Yet, he really liked it. What was happening? He was assimilating another step into my culture! That story is a metaphor to help us understand the power of a SEND Center.

Can you imagine if a family of eight people would have greeted Shuhei when he first stepped off the plane on American soil and everyone hugged him? That is a metaphor for putting a baby Christian into a worship service. It is why a SEND Center is a great “first step” for those who hear your God stories. When guests accept your invitation to a SEND Center, they make a small step response toward the power of God’s Good News about Jesus—a baby step! This is the Holy Spirit at work.

Your God stories are important. You may remember when the disciples asked Jesus, “Why do you tell stories?” (They were referring to His regular use of parables.) Jesus said, in so many words, “You guys have been with me for a while, and you ‘get it.’ But those other people? They need help to get it.” Jesus said, “I tell stories to nudge the people toward receptive insight.”⁶ We might call it “taking baby steps” as it applies to spiritual growth. This concept is powerful!

When you share your God *stories*, they have impact. They are your personal parables! When you invite receptive people to your SEND Center gathering and some of your friends share their God stories, there is even more impact. However, if these baby Christians were to be immediately invited to a church service, what would they see and hear? From their perspective, it would be overwhelming!

Jesus said, “I tell stories to nudge people toward receptive insight.”

Sadly, instead of God stories, many Christians have only one strategy: If a person takes the initiative to show interest in anything spiritual, invite them to church! Jesus didn’t even invite the disciples, at the beginning, to worship Him. He made it simple: “Come follow me.” Today, that invitation might be, “Want to meet for coffee at Starbucks?”

In truth, baby Christians from an unchurched background usually grow in faith more easily and faster among people somewhat like

**Your God stories are
your personal parables!**

themselves. They also grow more easily and faster among a small group of people. In a smaller group, they don't experience the

challenges of the big group. (That is one reason why most churches grow faster at first, then slow down when they get larger.) This is why a SEND Center is helpful. It is relationally sensitive to non-Christians and more "friendly" to unbelievers of another "culture."

The SEND Center is an ideal environment for new Christians to learn more about Christianity. It is not difficult! Invite the person and their family to a small group of friends and other guests (brought by other Christians who are part of your SEND Center). Introduce your guest to everyone. Other "new" guests are introduced as well. Someone from your church prays. You have refreshments to share. The leader asks those from your church to share what God has done in their lives since the last time you gathered. (If your guest shares something about God, that is very special! Sooner or later, they probably will—if you are willing to continue the SEND Center as a lifestyle. It's not a program!)

**Jesus made it simple:
"Come follow me."**

After food and fellowship, you read from a Bible and discuss, or watch the DVD from the Alpha course. As mentioned in Chapter Nine, Alpha is an excellent introduction to Christianity. The video presentations are very good! When it is finished, remember to use the few questions that accompany each lesson. During the Alpha questions, allow discussion and encourage comments. At some of your gatherings, you can play *The Gift* game. Continue to encourage your new friends to bring their spouses and children. Before the end of the gathering, encourage everyone to come back. Schedule times and dates that are good for those you have invited. The series called *The Chosen* is an

outstanding example of the power of stories. It is a wonderful way to introduce Jesus to others.

When Jesus says, “...you will be my witnesses...,”⁷ He encourages you to “tell your stories of divine intervention.” Your God stories are

A SEND Center is not a program!

not about you. They are indeed *God* stories—God working in you. The people of God in the early church were called disciples of Jesus. Then

they became known as witnesses. Rodney Stark in the book *The Rise of Christianity* says, “...the primary means of [Christianity’s] growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives, and neighbors to share the ‘good news.’”⁸

Can you imagine what God might do if many of those in your church would share their God stories and become witnesses? Can you picture an army of young adults trained in SEND North America as

Your God stories are not about you.

“missionaries” to others? Can you feel the power and enthusiasm of young people on fire for Jesus? Can you picture your church with ten, twenty, fifty, or even one hundred SEND Centers scattered throughout your geographical area? Can you see the multiplication and explosion of Christianity? Can you sense a movement? Can you feel a revival? It can begin with you! You begin by sharing your God stories. Share what God has done in your life.

What is God saying to you? And, what are you going to do about it?

Seven Questions for Discussion
Chapter Ten

1. Do you see how we often rush the spiritual growth process for new Christians? What do you think about that? What about our children being moved rapidly into the worship service where the language patterns are not at their level of understanding, the seats don't fit their bodies, and the length of communication is not anywhere close to their attention spans? Does your church offer a children's church? If a family wants to worship together, do the parents attend the children's church—with their children? The missionary principle is this: The more mature Christian always subordinates his or her preferences to the less mature Christian.
2. Do parents sometimes practice cultural chauvinism with their children? Do Christians practice cultural chauvinism with people of different cultures? Are we culturally sensitive to people who are brand-new Christians? How would you rate your sensitivity on a scale of 1 to 10?

Insensitive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Sensitive like Jesus

3. Do you know someone who is a baby Christian, yet they are older than fifty? Not to be critical or judgmental, but how sensitive is your church to the culture shock that a person like that might experience? How sensitive are you? What do you think about the idea of treating baby Christians—at any age—more sensitively?
4. Do you think SEND Centers, as a middle step for new Christians, are a good idea? Does your church provide that middle step in *any* form? If not, why do you think it doesn't?
5. Have you ever known a growing Christian—at any age—who has gone through spiritual culture shock? What was the final outcome? Are they still around the church?
6. How sensitive have you been to the journey of new or young Christians? Has this book encouraged you to become more sensitive? What will you do to improve? How will you start? When?

7. Do you think Jesus would approve of intentionally grouping Chinese Americans together in a SEND Center to ease the spiritual culture shock of reaching more Chinese Americans and then, later, gently bringing them into a multicultural worship experience? Or, is that being prejudicial? What do you think it looks like when the Great Commission is translated, “As you go about your life, make disciples of all ethnics (people groups)”? How might that change your outreach approach to those who are presently far from God? Has this book had any impact on your life for telling God stories? Are you praying for those non-Christians in your social network? Are you assimilating them as they take baby steps into your church? If so, how will you multiply the movement by sharing it with other Christians? What is God saying to you? And, what are you going to do about it?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Literary excellence is achieved through a long process with a team of dedicated partners—each one contributing their wisdom, experience, and unique gifts.

The journey for this contribution to the Christian movement actually began decades ago. As a pastor of Zion Lutheran Church, Corunna, Indiana, I had the privilege to introduce the lifestyle of God stories. It began in a Bible class and spread—as a movement—through Christ-followers who were ignited for mission. Those believers are evidence that sharing Jesus is an exciting journey.

I'm grateful for Tracee, our next-generation leader at Church Doctor Ministries—who shared unique contributions to this effort. Tracee, you bring so much to this ministry of helping Christians and churches excel in their ability to reach their communities for Jesus.

I'm grateful for those who provided critical review of the manuscript: Rob Olson, Frank Grepke, Paul Griebel, and Bob Shriner. I am thankful for the many hours of critical review and polish provided by my wife, Janet. We started life together as you proofed my two doctoral dissertations, and more than two dozen books later, your input raises the level of value on every page.

I am indebted to our Church Doctor board members, who guide and encourage our work to help Christians and churches become more effective for the noble work of Jesus' Great Commission. God bless you,

Greg Ulmer, Mark Welty, Mark Sattler, Mike Travers, and Steve Peterson.

It is such a pleasure to work with the staff team at Church Doctor Ministries: Jason, Chelsey, Beth, John, Katie, Todd, Barry, Chrysanne, Tom, and Becca. Together, God uses you to change lives, whole churches, denominations, and networks of congregations. The Lord knows who you are and what you do to help God's people make disciples who make disciples.

It is my prayer that this project will impact Christ-followers in the same way the movement ignited the passion of believers in the New Testament. Our world needs Jesus!

ENDNOTES

Introduction

1. (In the year 2000, it was 70 percent.) Jones, Jeffrey M. “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades.” Gallup.com. April 18, 2019.
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>.
2. Check out *The Damascus Road* (<https://churchdoctorministries.com/product/damascus-road-dvd/>), a video-based training designed to equip Christians to be missionaries at their own pace, in their own church.
3. In our book about church government, *Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making* (Church Doctor Ministries: 2023), I have described a biblical approach to decision-making. It is very different than the way most churches and denominations are organized. To do it God’s way liberates His people to accomplish the mission more effectively. Check out the Church Governance Consultation process provided by Church Doctor Ministries at www.churchdoctor.org.
4. *Your Spiritual Gifts: Discover God’s Plan for Your Life*. Kent R. Hunter, Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2018. To schedule a workshop for those in your church to discover their spiritual gifts, see www.churchdoctor.org.
5. See Ephesians 4:11-13.
6. See Philippians 1:12-21.

Endnotes

7. Philippians 1:14. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.
8. Philippians 1:17. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.
9. Philippians 1:18-19. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002 (emphasis mine).

Chapter One: Why Sharing Faith Terrifies

1. Sweet, Leonard I. *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture: 10 Life Rings for You and Your Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999, p. 220.
2. See our book *A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2023.
3. Hunter, Kent R. *Your Spiritual Gifts: Discover God's Plan for Your Life*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2018.
4. "The Most Post-Christian Cities in America: 2019." Barna Group (emphasis mine).
<https://www.barna.com/research/post-christian-cities-2019/>.
5. Acts 1:8, my paraphrase, my emphasis.

Chapter Two: When Hopelessness Helps

1. Attributed to Winifred Newman.
2. SEND Movement (www.thesendmovement.com). The SEND Movement equips church members and staff in the key elements of mission training. It develops those in your congregation who want to learn the exciting aspects of effective outreach. When it is implemented, even among a small portion of the church members, God blesses a church with much greater impact and with spiritual and numerical growth. This training includes the development of SEND Centers and "boot camp" training for

- young adults called SEND Young Adults. These issues will be covered in Chapter Nine.
3. I have written about this in the book *A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2023.
 4. 1 Peter 1:3. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971.
 5. 1 Peter 3:15. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011 (italics mine).
 6. Attributed to Hal Lindsey.
 7. Miller, Donald. *Building a StoryBrand: Clarify Your Message so Customers Will Listen*. New York: HarperCollins Leadership, an Imprint of HarperCollins, 2017. My colleague and writing partner at Church Doctor Ministries, Tracee Swank, is a StoryBrand Certified Guide who helps churches communicate clearly. When churches improve their “story” on their website, in newsletters, bulletins, signs, etc., the results are amazing.
 8. Luke 10:25-37. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971.
 9. Miller, *StoryBrand*, p. 20.
 10. Matthew 9:38 (my paraphrase).
 11. 1 Peter 1:3 (my paraphrase, emphasis mine).
 12. 1 Peter 3:15 (my paraphrase).

Chapter Three: The *Feel-Good* Trap

1. Burke, John. *No Perfect People Allowed: Creating a Come-As-You-Are Culture in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005, p. 46.
2. Dr. Henry Cloud, heard at the Global Leadership Summit, August 2013.

Endnotes

3. Kingdom culture drift is the focus of *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival* by Kent R. Hunter and Tracee J. Swank. New York: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017, pp. xxiii-xxiv.
4. www.alphausa.org
5. Gibbons, Dave. *The Monkey and the Fish: Liquid Leadership for a Third-Culture Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, p. 143.
6. 2 Corinthians 5:20. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
7. Peters, George W. *A Biblical Theology of Missions*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995, p. 209.

Chapter Four: The Evangelism Committee Catastrophe

1. A mistranslation of John 3:16.
2. One of the services of Church Doctor Ministries is the Church Governance Consultation. It helps congregations move from a secular governance model to a liberating, spiritual form based on Scripture. www.churchdoctor.org. Also check out our book *Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making*.
3. Pierson, Paul E., *The Dynamics of Christian Mission: History through a Missiological Perspective*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2009, p. 352 (my summary).
4. Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017, p. 171.
5. Matthew 28:19. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011 (emphasis mine).
6. Luke 19:10. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011 (emphasis mine).
7. Matthew 9:11 (my translation, emphasis mine).
8. Mick Woodhead, former senior leader, St. Thomas Church, Crookes, Sheffield, U.K.

9. Hunter, Kent R. *Your Spiritual Gifts: Discover God's Plan for Your Life*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2018.
10. Sweet, Leonard I. *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009, p. 31.
11. Hebrews 12:2. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
12. Matthew 16:24-25. *Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version*. New York: American Bible Society, 1976.

Chapter Five: "I" Witness

1. Leith Anderson, speaking to the church in the 21st Century Conference, June 1992, adapted.
2. Miller, Donald. *Blue Like Jazz*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2003, p. 13.
3. See Isaiah 40:31. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.
4. 1 Peter 5:8. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971.
5. See 1 John 4:4 (my paraphrase).
6. See 1 Peter 5:8.
7. William Kumuyi shared this at the meeting of the North American Society for Church Growth, November 1993.
8. Jeremy Camp, "We Will Overcome" from "We Cry Out: The Worship Project." Released August 24, 2010. Label: Brandon Ebel Company (BEC); Copyright: 2010 Capitol Christian Music Group.
9. Revelation 12:10 *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002 (my expansion).
10. Revelation 12:11. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002 (my expansion, emphasis mine).
11. Matthew 4:19 (my paraphrase).

12. Isaiah 43:19a (my paraphrase).

Chapter Six: Launching a Movement in Plain Sight

1. Attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson.
2. Romans 12:2. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971.
3. We have reflected on the movement concept in our book *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*, pages 226ff. This concept is based on the book by Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, fifth edition. New York, NY: Free Press, 2003.
4. Gerlach, Fulton P., and Virginia H. Hine. *People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation*. New York, NY: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970, xvi.
5. Diagnostic Consultation. www.churchdoctor.org.
6. See my book on church government for information. *Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making* available from www.churchdoctor.org.
7. Schein, Edgar H., and Peter Schein. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017, p. 11.
8. Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York, NY: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017.
9. Romans 12:2. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971.
10. Matthew 28:19-20. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
11. Bolsinger, Tod E. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2018, p. 73. See also: Andy Crouch, *Culture*

- Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013. pp. 191-192.
12. Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017, pages 50-72. To facilitate cultural development, invite early adopters to read *Who Broke My Church?* and discuss it using the *Group Gathering Guide: Who Broke My Church?*—a fourteen-week adventure in Kingdom culture. Church leaders who have used these tools with early adopters have observed the beginning of a renewal movement resulting in outreach to their communities. *Group Gathering Guide: Who Broke My Church?* is available at www.churchdoctor.org.
 13. Many churches have used the SEND Movement, mentioned briefly in Chapter Two (www.thesendmovement.com). This movement equips early adopters in mission training.
 14. Matthew 16:13, 15.
 15. Matthew 16:16, 18.
 16. To hear more about this strategy, listen to my podcast *Prescriptions from a Church Doctor*, episode 4 of my “Witnessing” series, titled “Launching a Secret Movement in Plain Sight,” released March 27, 2018.

Chapter Seven: The Platform of Relationships

1. Maxwell, John C. *Maximum Impact Recording*. Vol. 4, No. 2 (adapted).
2. Matthew 16:13, 15. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
3. Luke 10:2a (my paraphrase).
4. Luke 10:2b (my paraphrase).
5. Shared with the author at the Church Doctor Ministries’ Apostolic Council gathering in Jacksonville, Fla., January 25, 2010.
6. Matthew 9:38 (my paraphrase).

Endnotes

7. Matthew 28:19. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
8. Kinnaman, David. *You Lost Me*. Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2011, pp. 11-12.
9. The concept of the three tiers and the importance of “the excluded middle” is the teaching of mission professor Paul Hiebert.
10. The sociogram is explained in detail in our book *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*, New York, NY: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017, page 176.
11. Matthew 16:16, 18. *Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version*, New York, NY: American Bible Society, 1976.

Chapter Eight: Don't Feed a Baby Steak!

1. Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest: Selections for the Year*. Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2000, November 22.
2. See Matthew 9:38. *Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version*, New York, NY: American Bible Society, 1976.
3. Matthew 16:15-16. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971.
4. John 3:3. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
5. I heard this analogy from my friend George Hunter.
6. Dr. Brene Brown, Global Leadership Summit. August 8-9, 2013 (adapted).
7. See Matthew 28:19.
8. Your Spiritual DNA. (www.churchdoctor.org).
9. Hunter, Kent R. *Your Spiritual Gifts: Discover God's Plan for Your Life*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2018.
10. Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017, p. 169.

11. Ephesians 4:12 (my paraphrase).
12. See 1 Corinthians 3:2, “You’re acting like infants in relation to Christ, capable of nothing much more than nursing at the breast.” *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.

Chapter Nine: Adapt to the Mission Field in Your Backyard

1. Southerland, Dan. *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000, p. 31.
2. Matthew 9:17 (my paraphrase).
3. This exposure to key leaders and their churches in the U.K. has proven to be life-changing for North Americans, many of whom have never experienced a revival in a culture similar to their own. For more specifics, download *The Church Doctor Report*, Vol. 13 No. 3, May/June 2018, www.churchdoctor.org.
4. We have written about this in *A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time*. Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2023.
5. John 18:36a. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
6. We have expanded on this in the book *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York, NY: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017.
7. Don Elijio Panti, medicine man and botanist, as told to the author by his grandson.
8. Gibbs, Eddie. *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000, p. 187 (adapted).
9. You can take a survey to determine your level of holy discontent. You can have everyone in church take the survey. Then, you use a second survey. When you have the results, you will know where your church lands on the readiness for renewal continuum. This

Endnotes

will show how ready your church is to grow toward a God story movement. It also identifies early adopters. You can start the process by going to www.churchdoctor.org. Ask about the *Readiness for Renewal* surveys.

10. John 20:21. *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 1971 (emphasis mine).
11. Matthew 11:28. *King James Version of the Bible*, public domain.
12. Matthew 28:19-20 (my paraphrase).
13. Church Doctor Ministries has a video series called *The Damascus Road: Where Christians Become Missionaries* (ChurchDoctor.org). These teachings are geared for adults with holy discontent and a desire to sharpen their skills to share their God stories with others. The series teaches the basics of how to be a missionary right where you live. This series is used with the SEND Movement.
14. www.thesendmovement.com.
15. www.thesendmovement.com. To read the story of a young adult trained in the SEND model, see the book *The J-Dog Journey: Where Is Life?*
16. www.alphausa.org.
17. *The Chosen* directed by Dallas Jenkins.
<https://watch.angelstudios.com/thechosen>.
18. To order *The Gift*, visit <https://experiencethegift.com>.
19. www.thesendmovement.com

Chapter Ten: Closing the Culture Leap

1. Kinnaman, David. *You Lost Me*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011, pp. 11-12.
2. Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York: FaithWords, 2017.

3. Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, p.196.
4. Galatians 3:28. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
5. Told to the author by Barry Kolb at the Church Doctor Ministries Apostolic Council meeting in Detroit, Mich., in December 2006.
6. Matthew 13:10-11. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002 (my paraphrase).
7. Acts 1:8. *New International Version Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, Inc., 2011.
8. Stark, Rodney. *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997, p. 208.

APPENDIX

Sample God Stories:

What Powerful God Stories Look Like

God Story #1 from Allison

My hairdresser, Marge, mentioned that she and her husband, Joe, had an argument. It was about stress related to their misbehaving son, Ben, who is thirteen years old. This is the God story I shared with Marge.

“Yeah, Marge, kids: You love them, and sometimes they just drive you nuts. My husband and I went through a phase with our son, Sam, when he was eleven. It was causing stress in our marriage. I think we sometimes took our frustrations out on each other.

“One day, I was reading a modern version of the Bible. I read this line: ‘Love is patient, love is kind.’ It made me wonder how much I really loved my kid. Sometimes it’s hard! I just didn’t know whether I had the right kind of love that a parent should have. As I read more in the Bible, I realized it was also talking about God’s love; you know, His love for us, His love in us, and, probably, His love through us to others.

“I began to stress less and pray more for an increase of God’s love. I asked my husband to pray, too.

“Do you ever pray, Marge?” (Her answer was: “No.”)

“Well, it doesn’t have to be fancy. It’s just talking to God. Anyway, you know what? I think God helped us. I really do. And, as I think about it, we got through it, and Sam grew out of it. Honestly, Marge, I’m not sure I would have made it through those years without God.”

God Story #2 from Peter

I've worked with Bill, I don't know, maybe almost twenty years. We often eat lunch together in the cafeteria area at the shop. One day Bill shared with me that he was struggling with alcohol.

"You know, Bill, I don't brag about it, but I'm not too proud to tell you: When I was younger, I was a fairly regular drinker myself. It was before I met Jill. I was single, in college, and into the party scene. You know what I mean?

"Deep down, I knew it was beginning to interfere with my grades in college and even my part-time job. I didn't go to work hungover. But one day, Dan, our boss at the time, challenged me about my performance on the job. I was messing up, you know, tired from being out late the previous night.

"Dan asked if I went to church. I told him that I did when I was younger. He said that faith in God helped him with some of his problems. He also said his church had a program called Celebrate Recovery, like AA, but based on faith in the God of the Bible. He offered to go with me.

"At first, I was stubborn and resisted his invitation. But finally, I took him up on it. In the process, I became a person of faith again, and that really helped. Well, God helped me turn around. Maybe you should think about it.

"Bill, would you like to try Celebrate Recovery? I'll go with you if you would like. God made a big difference in my life. I think He would help you, too."

God Story #3 from Jonathan

I saw Mary at the coffee shop.

“Hi, Mary. I haven’t seen you around for a long time. How are you?”

Mary said she just buried her mother the week before. “It was a sad goodbye, Jon,” she sighed.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. Sorry for your loss. How old was she?” I asked.

“Eighty-two,” she said, with the pain of loss on her face.

“We’ll keep you in prayer. It’s a hard thing, losing a parent.”

Mary nodded in affirmation.

I continued: “I remember when my mom passed away. She’d been in a nursing home for a while. She had dementia. Sometimes she didn’t even recognize me. It was really hard! The last time we saw her, it seemed she was going downhill fast. My wife and I each prayed for her, and then our son and daughter each prayed as well. Then our son suggested that we pray the Lord’s Prayer together. He started, and, as we prayed, my mother said every word, with a smile on her face!

“We went to dinner. A half-hour after we got home, the nursing home called and said she was gone. It was very special!

“Mary, we’ll keep you in prayer. We’ll pray that God will comfort you. You call us if you need anything.”

“I appreciate that, Jon,” Mary replied.

“You know,” I continued, “we have a group of people who meet at our house each month. We have a meal and watch a video about faith. Some of them are friends from church. Others are friends and neighbors of those in our group. The video might really encourage you right now. We’d love to have you and Bill join us.”

Mary paused, then said, “I’ll ask Bill. When do you meet?”

“Our next gathering is two weeks from Friday,” I responded. “I’ll give you a call next week sometime and we can talk more about it. Meanwhile, Esther and I will be praying for you, Bill, and your family.”

God Story #4 from Barry

My wife, Marge, and I were in the grocery store and came across Brent and Amy.

“Hi, guys. How are you doing?” I said.

“OK, all things considered,” said Brent.

“What do you mean?” Marge asked.

Brent replied, “Did you hear about Amy’s car accident?”

“No,” I replied, with a tone of shock. “What happened?”

Amy responded, “I was coming home, turning left on the curve on the highway, you know, where the county road crosses the highway just east of town.”

“Yeah, that’s a bad spot,” Marge replied.

“Well, a guy behind me was glancing at his phone,” Amy shared.

“He hit me from behind, pushed me forward into oncoming traffic, and I was immediately struck by a pickup truck head-on. It totaled my car. I was taken by ambulance to the regional hospital. The two guys in the other vehicles walked away unhurt. After a thorough checkup in emergency, and after a couple of days of being treated for trauma, all I had was bad bruises.”

“You know, we believe in miracles. I think you are one of them! God was protecting you. We are so thankful you’re OK,” I said.

“Yeah,” Marge continued. “Sometimes it’s easy to forget how fragile life can be. We will continue to pray for you. We thank God you were spared and those other two guys as well.”

I added, “We’ll also pray for the guy who hit you. First, that he won’t look at his cell anymore, which he probably won’t! But, more important, that he knows God forgives him. We all make mistakes. But God even heals those.”

God Story #5 from Janice

“Hi, Nick!” I said, looking across the fence toward our next-door neighbor. “How’s it going?”

Nick wandered slowly in my direction until we were face to face over the fence. He spoke softly: “Hey, Janice, you know our son, Tom? He’s just turned twenty. He was just arrested for drugs.”

“Oh no,” I said sympathetically.

“Yeah,” Nick mumbled, as he looked toward the ground. “He’ll lose his scholarship. It will be in the paper tomorrow. My wife is just sick. I’m, well, I’m angry. How could he be so stupid? I can’t even talk to him—I’d probably just bust him in the mouth.”

“Hey, Nick,” I said, “do you know what happened to our daughter, back twenty-five years ago, when she was nineteen? She got pregnant. We were so embarrassed!

“It’s a challenge, isn’t it?” I continued. “But she learned from her mistake. We probably learned even more. For my husband and me, we had to learn about forgiveness and restoration. The incident actually moved us back to going to church.

“You know, Nick, God loves your son. If he’s sorry for the mess he’s in, God forgives him. So should you. We were disgusted by our daughter’s behavior. But we learned to love our daughter again—even though we didn’t like her lifestyle.

“And we came to love her baby girl. You know, our daughter married a Christian man who loves that girl like she’s his own. He even says that she’s a child of God like all the rest of us. Actually, like all of us. God loves us. And, none of us are perfect.

“It may sound strange, Nick, but we became stronger in our faith through that whole experience. That could happen to you, too—and even your son, Tom—if you let God help you through it. Would you and Gayle like to come over for dinner next Saturday?”

God Story #6 from Keith

I carpool with Jim. He works in the city in the same building where I work, but in a different department. I started the conversation on a Tuesday morning.

“Good morning, Jim. How’s it going, since the fire?”

“Hi, Keith,” Jim replied.

Jim told the story: “It took the garage and the room next to it,” he said. “We discovered we were really underinsured.”

Jim went on to explain that, through overspending, they were already in financial difficulty. The fire pushed them close to bankruptcy. “Keith, I don’t know if we’ll ever recover,” he said.

“Jim,” I shared, “did I ever tell you about when we were young and moved to Australia?” Jim nodded and said he never heard about our adventure “down under.”

I continued, “We were married only a year. Owning very little and not having kids yet, we thought it would be a great experience to live in another country for a year. I would go to grad school, and Laura would teach. We arrived with twenty dollars and no income for at least a couple of weeks—until my wife got paid at her teaching job. We did have a place to stay, at least temporarily.

“Some Aussies invited us to their church to hear an American speaker,” I said. “He spoke about trusting God and financially giving to God in a generous way. It was inspiring until they passed a basket for an offering! All we had was a twenty-dollar Australian note and no time to make change! We decided to trust God, like the American speaker said. The next day we got our first letter from America. It was from my mom back in the U.S. She forwarded the check for our tax refund, which we had totally forgotten about!”

I paused and then continued, “At that point, we decided to trust God and always be generous. That doesn’t mean life has been ‘all roses,’

but God has blessed us abundantly. Jim, I just want to encourage you. Trust God and believe this unusual promise: ‘You can’t outgive God.’”

Jim was quiet, but processing my story.

I said, “We’ll be praying for you, Jim, and your financial situation. Let us know anytime you want to talk. If you want to learn more about what God says on how we should trust Him to take care of us, just let me know. Maybe we could go to lunch together or something.”

God Story #7 from Kailyn

The other day I ran into Julie at the student union on campus. I hadn't seen her for a couple of weeks, so I asked, "How's it going?" Julie said she was worried.

"What about?" I asked.

Julie replied, "I seem to worry a lot, Kailyn. I'm worried about my grades, if I can afford tuition next year, and my old car's breaking down. Most of all, I'm afraid I might get breast cancer like my mom had."

"Do you believe in God?" I asked.

"Yeah, I guess, sort of," she said.

"You know, Julie, I used to worry about everything," I said. "Then I started attending that campus church. You know, that place over on Fifth Street, across from the library?"

"Anyway, I got into a Bible study and learned a lot, especially about trusting God—which I used to think was for weaklings or people who believe in fairy tales. But as I learned more, I discovered the Bible says, 'Place your cares, your worries, on Jesus.' It says, 'Put your trust in Him.'"

I continued, "Jesus taught that God even protects little sparrows, so you can trust Him to take care of you. It doesn't mean my life will be perfectly easy or without challenges. It just means God will give me strength to deal with whatever comes my way. That's also true for you, Julie."

After a moment of silence, I said, "I gave my life to God, and, well, it's hard to explain, but I do have a new kind of inner peace. I can still be concerned about stuff, but it never gets to the level of worry."

Julie was listening carefully. I added, "I go to a small group gathering every other Friday night. They're students who get together and learn about God. If you'd like to come along with me sometime, I think it might help you. It helped me. Just let me know."

God Story #8 from Wally

Bob's wife died of cancer at a young age. His anger toward God was hidden until one day at lunch. I asked Bob how he was doing, and he unloaded. I could tell he was in a lot of emotional pain.

"Bob," I said, "I'm really sorry for your loss. I feel bad for you. Actually, I've been praying for you. My dad died of a heart attack, related to asthma, at the age of forty-five. My mom was a young widow. My sister was in high school, and I was in college. Honestly? I wondered how God could let that happen."

I continued, "Yet, I know now, from reading the Bible, that 'God is love.' And, still, He sent His Son to die on a cross to pay for our sins. It wasn't an act of cruelty on the part of God to let that happen to His Son. It was an act of love for us."

Bob seemed like he was deep in thought.

After a pause, I said, "There's a verse in the Bible, maybe you've heard it, 'God loved the world so much'—He loves you and me so much—'He gave His only Son.' His Son died on a cross, awful pain that He didn't even deserve.

"When I thought about that," I continued, "I had a change of heart. Instead of being mad at God for taking my dad, I thanked God for my father's faith. I also came to realize that he was in a better place. In fact, I'm really thankful that my dad shared his faith in God with me, my sister, my mom, and others."

I said, "As I learned more about God, I realized that He isn't the one to blame for sickness and death. That's from the enemy, the devil, who tries to disrupt life and pull us away from God. Bob, God is stronger than that enemy. And I'm going to pray that you come to know that and get through this terrible loss of your wife."

After a silent pause, I decided to ask, "Bob, can I pray for you right now?"

God Story #9 from Deborah

My husband, Jason, and I went to our favorite restaurant and ran into Vi and Thom, friends we hadn't seen for almost a year. They are not practicing Christians.

"Hey, how are you guys? Nice to see you. Wow! It's been a while. How's life?" I said, rambling with the excitement of this impromptu reunion.

Vi changed her happy mood dramatically, according to the look on her face: "We're still in shock," she said. "You know Kim, our thirty-one-year-old daughter? She died on the day she was to be released from the hospital."

"Oh no! That's awful," I blurted out. "Can we sit down with you guys?"

Vi nodded in the affirmative. Jason and I grabbed the remaining chairs.

"So sorry to hear about that. How are you guys doing?" I asked.

After hearing about their tragedy, I told them our story, which they had never heard.

"When Jason and I were first married, what, maybe a year and a half after we got married, I got pregnant," I said. "The baby died at birth. We were crushed. It was awful. We felt guilty, confused, even a little angry with God, to be honest. Neither one of us had been to church since high school, except we got married in a church.

"When our baby died, we called the pastor and asked if we could meet. He was great with us. He shared that sickness and death don't come from God, but are a result of sin in the world. He made it clear: It wasn't our sins, but the condition of the world, a sinful world. He explained that it's why, sometimes, bad things happen to good people. To make a long story short, we started attending his church. Somehow, our tragedy led us to return to faith. We not only found a new source of

strength for our marriage, but a healing for the loss of our first child. Can we pray for you?”

We invited Vi and Thom to our small group Bible study, and they began attending our church after about a year.

God Story #10 from Carol

After church, Tom and I often go to breakfast at Cracker Barrel. We always ask the hostess if we can have a table in Brenda's section. She's our favorite waitress!

"Hi, Brenda!" we said, simultaneously, as she poured us coffee.

When Brenda brought our meals, I said, "Brenda, we're going to pray for our breakfast. Anything we can pray for you? Anything at all?"

Brenda's expression signaled something serious was coming. She said, "Our son Jim is in college, as you know. He's on the football team. But he's wandering from his faith. He doesn't ever go to church. He won't join the group at the Christian campus house. We're concerned about his faith."

"You know," I said, "our son, Joshua, was raised going to church. He was never a challenge. He always went with us to worship, no complaining. Then he went to college and joined a fraternity. They have lots of parties with alcohol and girls. He quit going to church.

"I put a note on my nightstand, next to our bed. I prayed for him every night before I went to sleep. We were worried. Faith in Jesus is really important to us. He was wandering, and it was killing us."

I continued, "You know, Brenda, sometimes God answers, 'Yes,' and sometimes, 'No.' Sometimes, it's just: 'Wait.' But, on the matter of faith in Him, it's always sure: God is on our side. Yet, He doesn't force us. You know, sometimes, God doesn't answer immediately, at least in our time frame. But the good news? After our son graduated from college, he traveled overseas, reconnected with his faith, married a great Christian woman, and is now studying for the ministry! Brenda, keep praying for Jim. We will keep praying, too!"



Call a Church Doctor!

Are you frustrated
that your church
isn't growing?

Is it starting to feel
less like a ministry
and more like a
country club?

Do you feel like all
your efforts yield
little fruit?

As a nonprofit Christian ministry, we offer proven strategies to help Christians, pastors, and ministry leaders become more effective at their mission: the Great Commission.

Effect Life Change

Our methods help
your church grow
both deep and wide.

Increase Health & Vitality

Track the improvement
in your church via our
9 measurable metrics.

Reduce Stress & Burnout

Our proven process
takes the stress off of
your leadership and
reduces burnout among
pastors and staff.

Here's how it works

①

Discover

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

②

Diagnose

Identify the ceilings and roadblocks
that are holding you or
your church back.

③

Prescribe

We guide you in creating an
implementation plan to break
through the ceilings and roadblocks
and achieve your goals.

④

See Results

Reach more people, multiply
disciples, and resource leadership.

**Partner with a Church Doctor and break through the
barriers that have held you back.**



Call a Church Doctor!
(800) 626-8515
CallaChurchDoctor.com

CLARIFY YOUR MINISTRY MESSAGE



Focused Message + Disciplined Strategy = Mission Momentum

Your formula for clear communication, expanded influence,
and increased joy in ministry



Cast a Clear & Compelling Vision

Clarify your mission
and message and
watch your church
grow in health and
vitality.



Increase Engagement

Clear
communication
in ministry allows
more people to
connect with who
you are and what
you do.



Reduce Friction & Frustration

Find joy in ministry
again and stop
spinning your
wheels with
outdated methods.

**We know how difficult it is for a church to reach people in a
noisy, distracted world. That is why we focus only on serving
churches and nonprofit ministries. We know you.
We have your back.**

1

**Schedule
a Call**

2

**Create a
Customized
Plan**

3

**Implement
Systems From
Your Plan**

4

**Receive
Ongoing
Coaching and
Follow-Up**

CHURCH DOCTOR
MINISTRIES

ClarifyYourMinistryMessage.com
Talk to a guide: (800) 626-8515

