



Immersion Excursions:

Catching the Culture of the Kingdom

By Kent R. Hunter, Founder, Church Doctor Ministries



“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by a renewal of your mind... then you will do what God wants.”

Romans 12:1-2

With these words, the apostle Paul was doing what apostles do: help Christians get back (and stay) on track with the culture of the Kingdom. In this letter, he was coaching the Christians at Rome.

Jesus *taught* this culture of the Kingdom in many ways. Most notably, He began some of His teaching with the words, “the Kingdom of God is like....” Sometimes He said the same thing, using slightly different words, “the Kingdom of heaven is like....”

Kingdom culture can reflect the confluence of five dimensions – all overlapping and intertwined, like a DNA helix. In fact, New Testament culture represents the DNA of God’s Kingdom. It is the blueprint for behavior. The five dimensions are: (1) values – what you consider important; (2) beliefs – what you understand as true; (3) attitudes – your “posture” or profile before God; (4) priorities – what you most consistently will always do first among competing activities that demand your attention; and, (5) worldviews – how you understand the world and the way the world works.

All five dimensions dramatically change as you mature as a Christian. Remember what Jesus said to Pilate? “My Kingdom is not of this world.” In other words, Kingdom behavior is not the same as “worldly” behavior. As a Christian, your behavior is shaped by your spiritual DNA and influenced by these five dimensions.

Why would the apostle Paul write the Christians at Rome and say, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind”? It is because they, like all followers of Jesus, lived in this tension: we are in the world, but not of the world. However, “the world” is constantly influencing us – subconsciously. A “renewal of your mind” is a rehab project directed by the Holy Spirit to correct the way we think. First Peter 4:1-2 (The Message) says:



Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you'll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.

Philippians 2:5 says, "The attitude you should have is the one Jesus had..." These teachings are all over the New Testament writings to church people. Why? It is because every Christian is susceptible to "drift" – everyday. Every church is susceptible to "drift" – everyday.

- When Christians drift, the church drifts.
- When the church drifts, it becomes less effective in its purpose: to make disciples.
- When the church becomes less effective in its purpose, it begins to decline.
- When many churches decline, with diminishing effectiveness, the nation moves from Christian-based culture to secular-based culture.
- When secular-based culture determines national resolve, civilization deteriorates.

As we look for answers, we become more receptive to God's solution.

However:

- As civilization deteriorates, people start looking for answers.
- As they look for answers, they become more receptive to God's solution.
- As they become more receptive to God's solution, they become open to hear God.
- As God speaks into their lives, the Kingdom culture begins to return.
- As Kingdom culture returns, "drifting" churches experience an "awakening" – a wake up call.
- As churches experience a wake up call, God restores the Christian movement.
- As God restores the Christian movement, the nation experiences healing.
- This is spiritual transformation.



How Does it Work?

Jesus taught His disciples about Kingdom culture: “The Kingdom of heaven is like...” But there is more, much more. He made sure they *experienced* the Kingdom. You have *read* and *heard* about the feeding of the 5,000. It has been preached and taught to you. But the disciples *experienced* it. Jesus asked them to pass out the food. They never forgot it. Why? Jesus made sure they were part of it. This experiential element is often lost in churches focused almost exclusively on the academic side of Kingdom culture: the preaching and teaching of truth – content. The experiential side is often missing.

Examples

- 100,000 pastors today will minister to someone at the hospital – and take no one with them to be equipped by experiencing.
- The way most people become Sunday school teachers is by being asked or begged, not disciplined by another Sunday school teacher.
- The worship leaders in a church – whether in a band or in a choir – see their primary responsibility as leading worship rather than multiplying themselves.
- Vacation Bible School helpers are recruited through announcements in church and pleas for help rather than by relational invitations from those who love VBS and reach out to those in their social networks, to say, in effect, “Come, follow me.”
- Men and women are trained to be pastors and most of their equipping is academic, with only a small portion of hands-on experience, most often, without a close relationship with a discipler.

Taught and Caught

Kingdom culture is actually more “caught” than taught. It is experiential. You catch it — not like you catch a ball, but like you catch a cold. You catch it by being up close and personal with someone who has it. This is more than content. It is something you “feel.” This is transformational change. Remember what Paul said to the Romans (12:2): “Don’t be conformed but be *transformed*.” Transformational change comes not only from academic



content. It is not simply taught. It is caught. You taste, smell, feel it. You come down with it, like you come down with the flu. Then you become *contagious*. Your contagion infects others with a holy infection. Then there is an epidemic. This is the *catalytic* effect of experiential impact. It becomes a Jesus epidemic. This is not exceptional. It is, from the Scripture perspective, normal. Christianity is supposed to be:

- A cultural revolution, not an institution.
- An inspirational lifestyle, not a traditional habit.
- Organic, not bureaucratic.
- Relational, not political.
- Spiritual, not rational.
- Spontaneous, not over-organized.
- Explosive, not static.
- A movement, not a program.

The Centers for Disease Control know more about an epidemic movement than most church leaders. Yet this is the design of Christianity, the movement. Transformation is caught, not taught. Who do you know who has become an enthusiastic fisherman because he read a book? Attended a class? Studied the content on “how to fish”? Most people who love to fish were invited by a friend or a relative. They were not invited to a conference, a class, or provided a manual. Someone essentially said, “Come, follow me.” For me, it was my grandmother. I was young. I could tell she loved it. I was attracted. She simply said, “Would you like to come along?” She got a fish on the line, gave me the pole, and I got to haul it in. Sorry for the pun, but I was hooked! This is not too far from what Jesus said: “Come follow me, and I will teach you to fish for men and women.”

Experiential Infection

Ever hear someone come away from a sermon or a Bible class and say, “I’ll never be the same!” It *can* happen, because God can do anything. It just usually doesn’t. Ever hear someone return from a mission trip or a work project or serving at a homeless shelter or a Christian camp, and say, “I will never be the same”? In truth, most people who share these



experiences do feel that way, and they are changed forever. They have been infected. They have caught what cannot be taught.

In the church, we do a great amount of teaching, but we don't do much "infecting." We don't, intentionally, invite people to an experiential exposure where God is working among people who have a "holy infection." The churches that constantly provide opportunities to do this are measurably healthier. Consequently, they have a greater impact on their communities. They are also more joyful congregations. In reality, they represent more people, by percentage, who have caught the culture of the Kingdom.

For transformational change, people must be engaged.

Research conducted by MIT showed people only retain about 10% of what they read. However, they remember 20% of what they hear and 50% of what they see demonstrated. When they are engaged in *doing* something, they catch what cannot be taught, and the retention rate skyrockets to 90%! This would explain why, when Jesus fed the 5,000, He had His disciples hand out the food. They experienced it. They were changed forever. This is why people who go on a mission trip say, "I will never be the same." This explains why Jesus designed the multiplication of His movement by making disciples. This includes personal and relational hands-on equipping of God's people for the work of ministry. It is connecting with a mature Christian in the growth process. Jesus knew this 21 centuries prior to the MIT research.

For Transformational Change, People Must Be Engaged

Over the years, Church Doctor Ministries has invited and "exposed" thousands of people to infectious Kingdom culture. How does this work? In John 5:19, Jesus said, "I only do what I see the Father doing." Many churches are focused on the next, latest, greatest program. Some programs are excellent, but most focus on teaching content. This is how programs get into the church: church leaders hear about a great program, bring it to the church, and unleash it among the people, praying like crazy that God will bless it. What Jesus taught was different. His words in John 5:19 are a paradigm shift. Don't do something and ask God to bless it, but



look where God is blessing and join Him there. Go where God is working, and get in the middle of it – and catch it!

This is what we do at Church Doctor Ministries. We look – all over the world, for where God is working. And we take people there – and let them rub shoulders with those who are “holy infected.” We brief and debrief them. Yes, we do some teaching. But we expose them to the holy infection. These are called Immersion Excursions.

Out of Your Comfort Zone

Many years ago, Church Doctor Ministries was asked to “fill in” at a conference for the pastor of the largest church in the world, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. (This is also the largest church in the history of Christianity.) Dr. David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of that church (and a friend), could not travel because there was a threat on his life (in South Korea). The conference was in Lagos, Nigeria, and drew 5,000 pastors who were expecting Dr. Cho. The most important part of this event is that God prompted us to take a group of about 20 “volunteers” who would help distribute materials, pray for the pastors, and serve the pastors and their families in an impromptu medical clinic that was a part of the conference. We even had a couple of physicians along who served in the clinic. To a person, we all agreed: we would “never be the same.”

There is a spiritual leveraging tool God uses through Immersion Excursions: when we are away from home, on someone else’s “turf,” we are not always “comfortable.” When we are out of our comfort zones, God has a greater opening into the fiber of our being. We are more susceptible to transformational spiritual change. At Church Doctor Ministries, we choose ministries experiencing enormous spiritual impact on large numbers of people. This in itself provides “culture shock” for many North Americans who have never seen the explosive growth of God’s Kingdom. This puts us in a state of spiritual receptivity.

The Great Commission is all about making disciples. By the way Jesus worded this Commission, it is clear that He didn’t prefer people doing ministry by themselves. He showed us how to gently invite, when He modeled recruiting to His disciples, “Come follow me.” Some followed Jesus. Some didn’t. It may be that there were many more who turned down Jesus’



invitation, and they just didn't make it into the Bible. Over the years, we have invited thousands of people to hundreds of Immersion Excursions and many of them, for whatever reason, have said "no." We understand. The Christian approach is to invite and let God move those who are ready to respond, to allow God to work in their lives.

Over the years, we have taken groups to Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, India, the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania, England, Germany, Brazil, South Korea, Canada, Japan, Philippines, Cambodia, Belize, and Thailand.

In the U.S., we have provided Immersion Excursions to unique and exciting ministries and Christian movements in California, Arizona, Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, Florida, Illinois, Texas, Oregon, Colorado, Indiana, Nebraska, and Arkansas.

Church Doctor Ministries identifies where God is moving, where God is producing exceptional fruit from Great Commission efforts. We analyze the quality and depth of effectiveness and develop a strategic partnership with those involved. We make arrangements to get up close and personal with leaders. We get "behind the scenes" to experience, first-hand, the joys, sorrows, victories, hardships, challenges, and cultural DNA God is using to bring people to Christ. We diagnose the strategic efforts God is blessing, to clarify authenticity and biblical integrity. We translate these activities into basic principles that are identified and explained by Church Doctor coaches in briefing and debriefing sessions. During the experience, your Church Doctor is available to you to help you translate principles into your unique situation. To a person, everyone who has participated in these Immersion Excursions has evaluated the experience in these words: "I will never be the same."

Are you ready to catch the holy infection?

**For more information about Immersion Excursions, contact Terry
(terryatz@churchdoctor.org).**

