

**Purpose:** To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

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## Is There a Four-Alarm Fire In Your Church?: Reaching Unchurched People Today

Have you noticed how the U.S.—and our world—is struggling with issues that abound with spiritual convictions?

- Kim Davis, the Kentucky County Clerk, who went to jail rather than issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples.
- Pope Francis, technically a “political figure” representing the Vatican, was invited to address a joint session of Congress. As he did, some were no doubt scratching their heads about the so-called “separation of church and state,” twisted from what Thomas Jefferson intended. As the camera drew back from the Pope in the chamber, the words on the wall, above Joe Biden and John Boehner, spoke a message loud and clear: “IN GOD WE TRUST.”
- Shots rang out in early October from a community college in Oregon. Eyewitnesses reported, the gunman asked: “If any of you are Christians, stand up.” They stood and he killed them, after saying, “You will meet your God in a few seconds.”
- Shock and horror ran through the citizens of Cleveland as police reported a drive-by shooting that took the life of a baby.
- The news continues to report the filmed investigations by David Daleiden as he

Kent Hunter says his favorite way to serve God is to help Christians remove roadblocks and become more effective in reaching others for Jesus Christ. With this passion, Kent has helped hundreds of congregations, provide “fresh eyes,” new insights, and recommendations. Kent says, “My greatest satisfaction comes when a church implements recommendations, begins to grow, and impacts their community at a whole new level. The timing in our nation has never been better.”



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### MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

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infiltrated Planned Parenthood and captured leaders negotiating for aborted fetal body parts.

- Reports continue about large numbers of Americans who live in a fog, addicted to prescription pain killers, meth, or heroin.
- A respected auto manufacturer, Volkswagen, gets caught falsifying emissions testing, lying to millions of customers.
- ISIS has parts of Europe in lockdown.
- The Pew Research Foundation reports 22.8 percent of U.S. adults say they have no religious affiliation—up from 16.1 percent in 2007. These so-called “nones” now outnumber Catholics (20.8%) and mainline Protestants (14.7%), highlighting the continuing drop in adults who identify as Christian.
- Nominal Christians are dropping away. Some churches in the same county are growing, thriving

### **A Sense of Urgency**

For the most part, life is good for many in the U.S. Yet, it seems that, among so many, there is a sense of hopelessness. In fact, researchers have called this “The Era of Pessimism.”

Long before news outlets described this as the most pessimistic time in recent history, those of us at Church Doctor Ministries were conducting research ourselves. We expanded the research to include an easy but profound learning experience for Christians.

We challenged church members to identify those in their social networks who are functionally unchurched. (They show no interest or involvement in worshipping God.) We directed them: “Ask the person, ‘What do you think it’s going to be like for your grandchildren?’” (For older people, we insert “great-grandchildren.”) It is really a question about hope for the future.

The vast majority of unbelievers say something like “not very good.” Then they begin talking about government gridlock, civil disobedience, national debt, potential future extinc-

## **TEN WAYS TO SOUND THE ALARM IN YOUR CHURCH**

1. Become a “God-watcher” of your community, a loving observer of those who are without Christ.
2. Help those in your church face the reality: We are on a greatly secularized mission field.
3. Spread the news: People without Christ are more receptive to be reached than ever before in your lifetime.
4. Use the key entry point: There is hope for your hopelessness.
5. Influence by the positive, not the negative: Don’t talk about what you’re against; focus on what you are for.
6. Encourage Christians to reorient their self-perceptions: Missionaries aren’t just people who go overseas. Every Christian is a missionary, everywhere, all the time. A trip to Wal-Mart is a short-term mission trip.
7. Change your theme, tempo, and focus from “business as usual” to a sense of urgency.
8. Wrestle with this challenge: You can’t reach unchurched people effectively using the methods you used before.
9. Preach, teach, and communicate a sense of urgency. It is personal: If you don’t apply outreach methods that work, your church will slowly dwindle, age, lose momentum, and die.
10. Communicate the signs that a move of God has already begun in the U.S. You have two choices: Wake up and make changes, or sleep right through it.

tion of Social Security, Wall Street corruption, murder in our streets, moral decay...the list goes on. Generally, people feel hopeless.

## **Hopelessness: Environment for Revival**

Whether you choose to call it a “revival” or a “move of God,” it often occurs during massive hopelessness. As Christians, our hope is in Christ. Bring on a recession, death in the family, a life threatening illness: our hope is beyond. Romans 15:13 is from a letter to Christians at the center of a morally decaying empire: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” For those who hope in everything but Christ, hope dissipates in the face of newscasts we see every day.

In this era of pessimism, 1 Peter 3:15-16 speaks loud and clear: “Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you...with gentleness and respect...” (TEV).

## **A Sense of Urgency**

My friend Tom Parrish tells a great story in his book, *Stepping Into Eternity*:

There is the story of Satan meeting with two troubled demons. It seems that these two demons had been successful in keeping a certain man from becoming a Christian. Every time this man would hear a sermon, the demons would either fill him with criticism or distract him. When the Holy Spirit would bring the man under conviction about his language or an unhealthy attitude, the demons would quickly convince him that he had a right to think that way or that the other person made him speak those harsh words.

The day came, however, when the man was seriously considering the claims of Jesus. The demons were getting nervous that this man just might make a commitment to Jesus as his Lord and Savior. The demons consulted Satan as to what they ought to do.

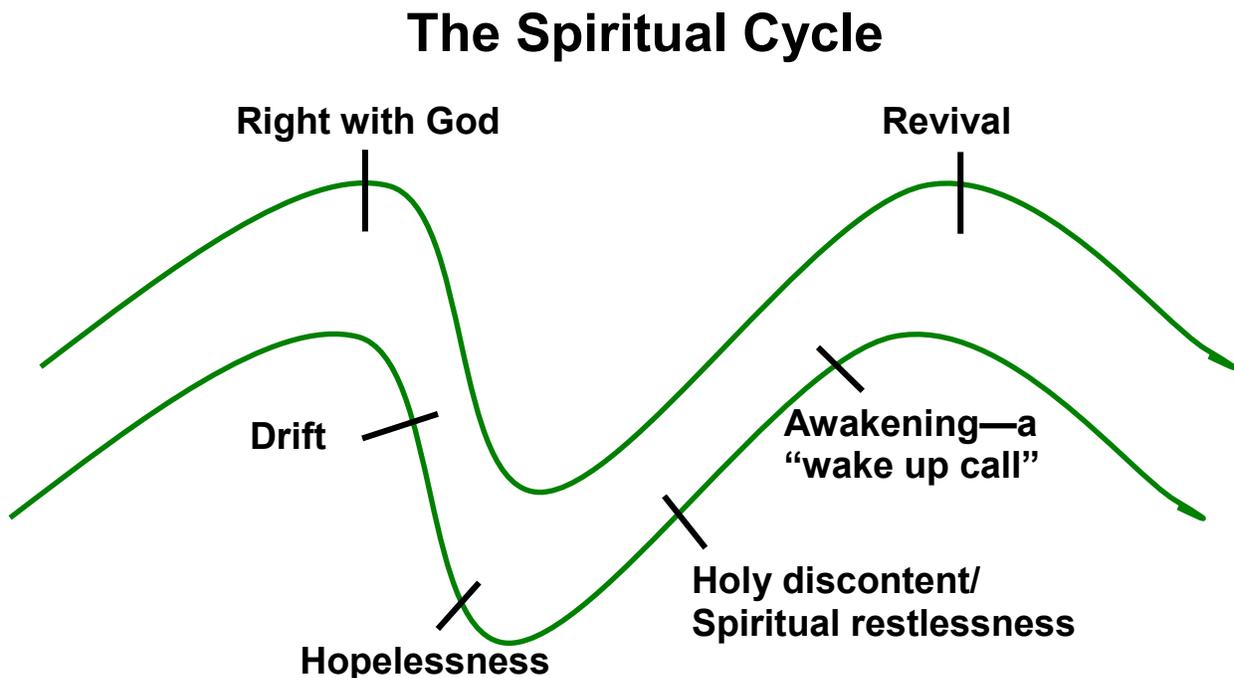
As the trio mused over the problem and potential solutions, one of the demons brightened up and said, “I’ve got it, we’ll just convince this man that there is no heaven, no reward for following Jesus!” Satan thought about it and said, “No, that won’t work. He may just become a Christian anyway out of love for Jesus.” The three went back to thinking about the problem. The second demon brightened and said, “Then let’s convince him that there is no hell, no punishment for refusing to become a Christian.” Again Satan contemplated the idea and then said, “No, I don’t like that idea either. Serving Jesus may be enough for him at that point. We need to come up with some full-proof idea.” As they continued to wrestle with the problem, Satan suddenly began to grin from ear to ear. “I’ve got it,” he said. “Let’s just convince him that he’s got plenty of time” (pages 59-60).

There are two major reasons this is an urgent matter for most Christians and their churches. First, as the U.S. is in a state of hopelessness, it is a season of opportunity. Pastors should be preaching on the hope in Christ. Christians should be trained to share their hope in Christ. The theme of hope should become a central pillar for outreach. This is the time when Christians should share their hope with those in their social networks as they tell their “God stories.” God stories occur when you share how God has worked in your life. You clearly witness how God gave you hope: when money was tight, when tragedy struck your family, or when you lost a loved one. You have dozens of these stories. They are living parables that live in your spiritual memory. They are your most effective way to witness.

Wake up—and discern this season of hopelessness, a time of great opportunity. Recognize this reality: When things are at their worst, Christians are at their best. This is a wake-up call for every church. Paul urged the Christians at Rome to “love their neighbors,” as the commandment says. He implied that, as Christians, we don’t separate from the world. We love others as much as we love ourselves. Paul gets firm: “You must do this, because you know that the time has come for you to wake up from your sleep” (Romans 13:9-11). This is a second matter of urgency.

### The Spiritual Cycle

As a second call to urgency, this becomes a timing issue. Throughout history, the followers of God have traveled spiritual cycles.



The cycle begins with the people of God who are “right with God.” In the Old Testament, there was a parallel comment, “...and all is right in the land.” Life was good, people got along, optimism was strong, and faith in God marked the environment. It was never one hundred percent, but a critical mass defined life.

Spiritual drift occurs next. Many become content and focused on material objects, slowly and

subtly falling away from God. God sends prophets. People run them out of town, or worse, stone them to death. Life and civilization deteriorates until hopelessness sets in. This is likely where the U.S. is today.

Before a coming revival, there is an awakening—a wake-up call Paul addressed with the church at Rome. Every Christian church in America is faced with a potential wake-up call right now. WAKE UP OR SLEEP—YOUR CHOICE.

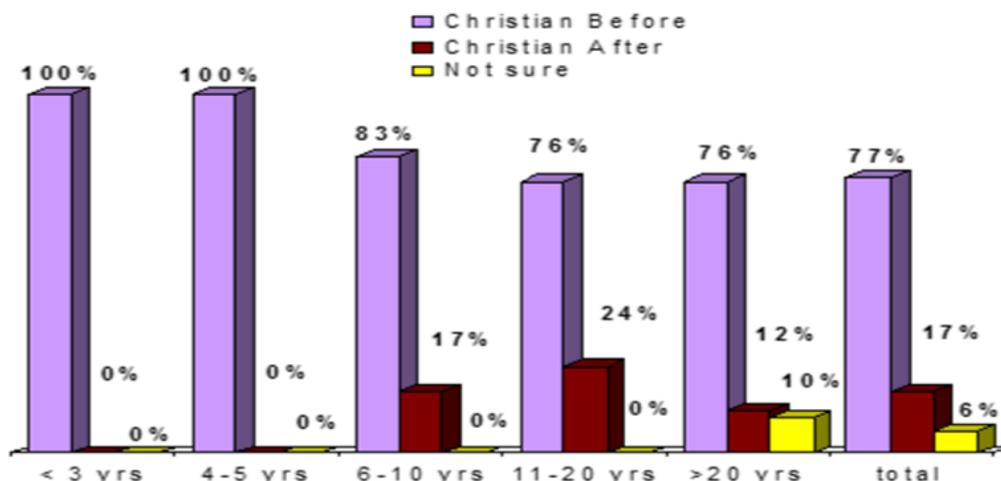
To ignite in the wake-up movement, the Holy Spirit has touched some Christians in every church. They have Holy Discontent, also called Spiritual Restlessness. (These are names we invented for those people). As you read this, if your heart is beating faster and your mind is racing with excitement, you likely have Spiritual Restlessness or Holy Discontent. You are a pioneer to start a movement in your church. However, one large hurdle remains: Your church, in all likelihood, does not know how to effectively reach unchurched people for Christ.

## The Big Hurdle

The greatest hurdle you and your church face is to develop effective strategies to reach the unbelievers in your community. This is the largest population group in the country. *If you and your church don't become effective at reaching those who are non-Christians since birth, you will not reap a harvest of believers in the coming revival/move of God.* In this season of secularism, your church will likely die. Long term, your church cannot sustain life by Christians producing babies or attracting believers from other churches.

When we consult a church, instead of relying on the church's records alone, we ask the people themselves, using an anonymous questionnaire given to everyone in worship. The question for this graphic is: "Did you become a Christian before you started attending this church, or after?" This means, in their own words, they demonstrate whether or not the church is effectively reaching "hard core, honest-to-goodness unchurched people." The graph below is from an actual church, but it reflects the general trend we see in most churches.

**Did you become a Christian before you started attending this church or after?**



This is the hurdle: While America has *increased* dramatically in the number of non-Christians, the Christian church has *decreased* dramatically in its ability to reach them. **This is the greatest challenge to the Christian movement in the U.S.** Most do not know how to reach unchurched people.

Many churches are working harder and harder, using old strategies that no longer work. To make the switch is very doable in every church. However, it is a big task that almost always requires outside help. Church leaders are simply not equipped to do this because they have not been trained in mission strategy. Get help, or your church will surely decline. Remember, the timing is like a four-alarm fire. To quote Jesus: "You have a saying, 'four more months and then the harvest.' But I tell you, take a good look at the fields, the crops are now ripe and ready to be harvested" (John 4:35, TEV).

"Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint" (Isaiah 40:31, NIV).

To schedule a phone appointment to discuss this topic further with Kent, call Jason Atkinson at 1-800-626-8515.



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