

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 Christian Outreach Caught and Taught?

As you mature into an adult, you learn a lot—probably more than you realize! Some of what you learned was positive—good for you, and your future. Some of what you learned was not that helpful.

For example, as I entered high school, I had no thought about going to college. Neither my grandparents nor my parents went to college. However, my parents had a different vision. They had hope that I would study for an advanced degree. They didn't focus on *what*, but *who* I would become. They wanted me to achieve beyond their educational experience.

The first surprise I learned from my guidance counselor was the need to study a second language. I couldn't see any value in that. It was actually a *foreign* concept—in more than one sense. So I picked Spanish. Why? It was the easiest choice to learn!

By midway through my senior year, God broke through my lapsed faith, and I shocked everyone by declaring my call to ministry. I had no clue what I was getting into. At the (Lutheran) junior college, I had to take Latin,

For twenty years, Kent Hunter and Tracee Swank have led annual trips to England to catch what can't be



taught about how God is working to revive Christians and their churches. This learning and growing *experience* connects Americans with world-class leaders who provide insights about what God is doing. Since the US often follows church trends in the UK, these insights provide a “first look” at what God may be doing next in North American congregations.

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German, and Ancient Greek. I understand the Greek—for the New Testament, but I had no interest in being a missionary to Germany. Further, who speaks Latin? Then, in senior college, I had to take ancient Hebrew, a language that reads right to left.

When I went to graduate school for my Ph.D., I had to qualify in two languages. I had no choice for the first one: It had to be fluency in Ancient Greek. For the second language, I picked Spanish.

During my eleven and a half years of education after high school, it became clear. Some of what you learn is taught. However, much of it is caught. The two years of “hands-on ministry” in churches (one in Australia while I attended seminary there and the other in Florida) were great.

The Method of Jesus

In the New Testament, the Scripture introduces us to our Savior. We learn a lot about sin and grace, salvation, church, ministry, and practical behavior. We are also introduced to the greatest movement of all time.

It is interesting how the Lord models ministry. He uses the classroom of real life. He picks each disciple and simply says, “Come, follow me.” There were twelve core guys, and, then, on a sort of second level, a group of other men and women who had personal face time with Jesus—beyond all those in the crowds. Among the core group, there was a great deal of teaching. However, those followers also *caught* what can’t be taught.

There are two dynamics to the Christian Movement. Believers in Jesus are taught. Yet, there is more: We need to *catch* what can’t be taught.

When Jesus turned the water into wine, there were likely some academic types who wondered, “How does that work?” Perhaps someone asked Him, “How did you do that?” If they did, it didn’t make it into the Bible. Why? It wasn’t a lesson on how to make wine fast and cheap. It was an undeniable experience that defines Jesus. He works miracles *and* He shares—with His Father—the element of abundance.

What Is Taught?

There is an abundance of material of what can be taught about the Christian faith, life, and effective mission in Scripture. The Bible is a huge book. What is your experience with God’s only written teaching?

When I think about it, I cannot count the number of times I’ve read through the entire Bible. I’ve worn out several Bibles. Literally, some of the pages are falling out. I have numerous underlines, and notes. That includes most versions in English, dating back to when I started college. There are several versions I have read numerous times. Some wore out. I had to buy another of the same version.

Don’t take that the wrong way. I am not bragging. In truth, every time I read passages of Scripture—even preach on them—I learn more. Perhaps I’m a slow learner. However, I have talked with other Christ followers who have the same experience.

Why is that? How can you read the same material over and over and keep learning new insights? It is because each time you pick up your Bible, you are a different person with new

challenges, more insights, and experiences from a world that is constantly changing—sometimes for better and often for worse.

Mission Strategy: Taught and Caught

In most churches, preachers focus a lot on what Jesus taught about how to live the Christian life. Why? We Christians need to continuously learn—and grow—all we can. If we are not growing forward, we are slipping away. It may be subtle, but it is a reality most honest believers have experienced—and will admit.

Since many congregations are plateaued or declining, those of us called “Church Doctors” focus on the mission of the church. The study of mission is called “missiology.”

My first church after graduate school was in the inner city of Detroit. It was a congregation with an amazing history. That church was birthed with a mission-minded pastor who had retired before I arrived. At one time, the church had the largest vacation Bible school in the denomination. However, that was a few years after I was born.

By the time I became their pastor, the church had been declining at a rate of 67 percent during the previous ten years. The neighborhood was changing. About 35 percent of the residents were African American. The church attendance was 100 percent Anglos, as was the staff. The congregation had a large number of great leaders and very supportive members. Yet, everyone knew we were a declining congregation. As a new pastor, with mission enthusiasm, I tried several approaches to turn the trend from decline to growth. There was a significant number of the core members who joined in efforts to reach our community.

After about a year and a half, this occurred to me: with all my schooling, I had no clue how to guide the church to effectively grow and reach our community. Meanwhile, I was kept busy: I had close to fifty funerals each year. The trend was obvious.

KEY RESOURCES

2023 England Immersion Trip

(www.churchdoctor.org/england2023)

Brierley, Peter. *Capital Growth: What the 2012 London Church Census Reveals*. Kent, UK: Brierley Consultancy, 2012.

Brierley, Peter. *God's Questions: Vision, Strategy, and Growth*. Kent, UK: Brierley Consultancy, 2010.

Brierley, Peter. *Growth Amidst Decline: What the 2016 Scottish Church Census Reveals*. Kent, UK: Brierley Consultancy, 2016.

Gumbel, Nicky. *Questions of Life*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins, 2018.

Hawthorne, Andy. *Being the Message: Lessons Learned on the Frontline of Mission*. Manchester, UK: The Message Trust, 2017.

Hawthorne, Andy. *Here I Am: Joining God's Adventurous Call to Love the World*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2019.

Hawthorne, Andy. *Here I Am, Seek Me: More Teaching from the Book of Isaiah and Powerful Stories from the Message Trust*. Manchester, UK: The Message Trust, 2016.

Holy Trinity Brompton (Nicky Gumbel).
www.htb.org.

Hunter, Kent R. *Move Your Church to Action*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000.

I called my district office and asked for help. I was told by the mission executive, “We don’t do well in that situation. We have already closed a dozen churches in the Detroit area.” Then, I called my denominational office and talked to the mission department. I was told that churches like mine usually die. I asked if there were any congregations in our denomination in this situation that were growing. Again, the answer was negative.

In the middle of my discouragement, I received some “junk mail” sent to pastors. It was from a seminary in California that trained pastors in missiology. The classes were taught by career missionaries who (1) had graduate training in missiology and (2) experience on a foreign mission field somewhere around the world. They felt called to train busy pastors in America in the basic elements of mission so they could equip their members to become missionaries to their communities. My church leaders gave me permission to give it a try. In the next few years, our church grew significantly, including outreach to African Americans, who became members and leaders in our church.

From Taught to Caught

Word about our growing congregation spread around the country. It wasn’t long before I began to get requests to teach mission principles in other countries. My first invitation was to Nigeria in West Africa. There, I taught pastors about mission. Perhaps even more importantly, I *experienced* a dramatic mission field.

To make a long story short, I returned to Nigeria thirteen times to teach large conferences for pastors. As time went on, I was invited to teach in South Africa, Kenya, India, the former Soviet Union, Brazil, Japan, Belize, and elsewhere.

My point? For each trip, I invited ten to twenty American and Canadian pastors and church leaders. I gave them work to do. I allowed them to teach and serve. They *caught* mission beyond what can be *taught*. Without exception, these North Americans *experienced* mission. They would never be the same!

This raises some serious questions: Why aren’t most pastors trained in missiology here in North America? When I began the assigned reading for each of my classes in missiology, I wondered: “Where did these books come from? Why didn’t I get this material in four years of college, four years of seminary, and three years of graduate school?” My conclusion? Most North American denominational leaders have a false worldview. It is subtle but powerful. They believe the “mission field” is exclusively “over there” somewhere! Consequently, most pastors—and almost all church members—have never been trained in missiology—the biblical teaching of mission work that leads to making disciples of previously unchurched people.

KEY RESOURCES

Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *The J-Dog Journey: Where Is Life?* Corunna, IN: Church Doctor Ministries, 2017.

Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Who Broke My Church?: 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. New York, NY: Hachette/FaithWords, 2017.

Ivy Church (Anthony Delaney)
www.ivychurch.org.

St. Thomas Crookes (Tom Finnemore). <https://stthomascrookes.org>.

The Message Trust (Andy Hawthorne).
www.message.org.uk.

Thorpe, Ric. *Resource Churches: A Story of Church Planting and Revitalisation Across the Nation*. Self Published, 2021.

Worship Central (Tim Hughes, Gas Street Church), <http://worshipcentral.org>.

The England Phenomenon

A number of years ago, my friend, Walt Kallestad, pastored a megachurch in Phoenix. His church began to host leadership conferences for pastors and church leaders. Walt invited me to be a regular speaker at these conferences. After one of these gatherings, we were meeting socially and Walt said to me, “Have you been to England to see what is happening with the Christian Movement?”

I told Walt I had been to England a few years earlier to speak at some conferences and work with leaders at the world headquarters of the Salvation Army, which is in London. However, at that time, most of the local churches were in decline. Then Walt told me of a recent phenomenon among a growing number of churches. It was a movement that greatly impressed him. He said, “Kent, for what you do, you need to go and see what is occurring in England among some of these churches.”

Reluctantly, I planned the trip and invited three pastors to go with me. Each one of them served a congregation in a different denomination. I knew them because I had consulted their churches.

What we learned in England was phenomenal. At that time, there were a few churches that were exploding with exciting growth—reaching people of all ages. I spoke with the leaders of those churches and asked, “If I brought a group of pastors from North America and some of their church leaders, would you allow us to visit and *experience* what God is doing in and through your churches? They graciously agreed!

You see, this is what we knew: (1) England is more similar to North America than Africa, South America, or anywhere else. (2) North American pastors and church leaders can easily relate to what God is doing in Great Britain. (3) Most importantly, mission is more easily caught than taught.

For twenty years (excluding the two COVID years), Church Doctor Ministries has led groups of North American pastors and church leaders to visit England for ten busy days. We have made friends with even more key pastors and leaders who meet with our group. We see their churches and ministries in action. It is a life-changing experience. We learn and *experience*.

Now, with COVID behind us, we are so excited for our next trip to England in April 2023. It is a life-changing experience. Investing in North American Christians who can imprint their churches at home is a great way to ignite congregations, *allowing leaders to catch what can't be taught*. During our trips to England, we also encourage our travelers, at the end of the trip, to spend some days in London, one of the most amazing world-class cities where people speak (a brand of) our language. You see, you simply cannot teach what you can catch.

Jesus started His ministry in an interesting way: He simply said, “Come, follow me.” The rest is history. God still uses people like you and me to make history. In the spiritual realm, it produces dramatic change in others, their churches, and in nations. You can learn more about our next trip to England by visiting www.churchdoctor.org/england2023.