

**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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## Constipated Christians

While it sounds like a weird title, please hear me out. This is an invaluable diagnosis from a Church Doctor who has analyzed over 1,700 churches in 78 denominations and in nondenominational and independent congregations and who has taught tens of thousands of pastors on six continents. Perhaps even more important, I've intensely pored over the Scriptures for numerous decades, with special focus on reaching lost people for Jesus and bringing them into healthy, growing congregations.

I recently read an outstanding article in a well-known Christian journal. It was well documented. Yet, it also raised a severe concern. It caught my attention on one of the greatest challenges facing many churches. Yet, the issue is not addressed by most Christian leaders.

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Tracee consult churches that want to effectively reach unchurched people through meeting needs and training God's people in mission principles that work. God wants lost people to be found and brought into your church.

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## The Article

This excellent article was about several churches that have raised the bar for in-depth Bible study. They have developed an approach in which many of the members are involved in serious Bible study. This excellent focus on going deeper into Scripture has become a movement. The focus is beyond the common adult Bible classes that attract some adults in most congregations. This approach goes deeper—beyond the scope of what most congregations offer. In fact, several seminaries and Bible colleges have approved the course for credit. That could encourage some who feel God's call to consider full-time ministry—and eventually enroll in one of these schools to achieve that goal.

It is exciting to see the desire of Christians to learn more of God's Word—beyond sermons and classes, which are limited by time and content. There will never be a time in the life of a serious Christ-follower when we conclude that we have received “enough” about God's only *Book*. I gladly confess that, though I've been cover to cover through numerous versions of Scripture, usually several times, I still receive spiritual insight every time. Bible reading—feeding on God's Word—is a lifelong function.

**You can't outlearn  
God's Word.**

Who would ever criticize a Scripture approach that helps Christians learn more about God? In my journey toward ministry, I spent four years at a Christian college. I studied Scripture in the original Greek and Hebrew languages. Then I spent four years in seminary, with one of those years as an internship in Adelaide, South Australia, and another in a church in Winter Haven, Florida. In both, I had to focus on Scripture to preach and teach that powerful Word of God. After a final year at seminary, most of my classmates went on to pastor churches. Not me. I wanted to learn more. So, I went to grad school and earned a PhD in theology. This is what I discovered: you can't outlearn God's Word—ever.

So, I'd be the first person to yell, “Amen!” and “Hallelujah!” to any effort that expands the impact of Scripture in the Christian's life. And I applaud the churches that are multiplying Bible study, going deeper, and impacting more believers. The deeper Christians go in Scripture, the better off the church will be.

## So, What's Your Issue, Kent?

After taking about every course my 11 years of ministry training offered, my denomination placed me in a church that had been declining at a rate of 67% during the previous 10 years. The three previous pastors on staff were gone: one retired, one was asked to leave, and the third made the wise choice to move on to another church in a different state.

In this first congregation for me to lead, I discovered some great people who remembered “the good old days” when they were a megachurch—a rising star on the denomination's horizon. They had the largest Vacation Bible School and the largest Sunday school among thousands of congregations in their national network of churches. However, that was back when I was 5 years old!

Now, they were a greatly reduced group of wonderful, aged Christians. They were followers who remembered the “good old days.” The block-long facility was mostly unused. The number of Sunday school classes was reduced from 20 to one. The largest group were the senior citizens. We had very few baptisms and numerous funerals. The neighborhood had changed. Most of our families had moved to the suburbs. Many had already joined other suburban

congregations.

As a new, young pastor, I had received much great Bible teaching—and was eager to share it. In other words, I had excellent theology. Yet, there was no future for that church unless it reached out. After about one year, it occurred to me: (1) I had learned a lot about the Bible; (2) I was eager to help my people learn it; (3) I knew almost nothing about outreach—after all those years in training! I was theologically constipated and missionally clueless!

Our community had been changing for years before I got there. I learned that many of the members who were still at the church had sold their homes and moved. Many of those homes were bought by young, African American families who were unchurched. There were African Americans in the houses across the street, but none in our church. Most of those families had no church home. What looked like a challenge to some of our members seemed to me like a great opportunity for mission outreach.

I gathered a group of our most involved members. I looked for those who were deep in the Word of God, regular in Bible class, and students of the Scripture in their own personal lives. We purchased an outreach program: several months of learning an outreach outline and sharing a Gospel message. We made calls to our neighbors. Most seemed receptive. None came to church.

With all the academic degrees and my huge library of well-worn books, it became clear: I knew next to nothing about effective outreach. I could teach and preach good theological content. Yet, as for Bible-based outreach *tactics*, I knew practically nothing! I mean, no offense—to God or to you—but I was *theologically constipated*, and so were my members.

Here's the point: *You can be so heavenly minded, you're no earthly good.* I would never suggest less scripture learning. That is *NOT* the point. You can have the best Bible study movement in your church and still fail to reach the unbelieving family across the street. You can be a super Bible-centered church and die if you don't learn, teach, and train others in mission principles. You can be part of a denomination that focuses on “right doctrine,” yet declines. The Christian movement can get constipated. In truth, most of the churches we have consulted are great congregations with little effective movement. Jesus did say, “Come, follow me.” He also said, “Go, make disciples.”

In my deepest frustration, at my darkest moment, I called my denomination's regional office and asked to speak to the person in charge of mission. I described my situation. He literally said, “We don't know what to do in that type of situation. We've already closed twelve churches in your city. They were all in the same situation.” I then called my denominational headquarters and asked to speak to the people in charge of missions. I talked to the leader, and he basically said the same thing. I asked, “Of all the thousands of churches in our denomination, can you name one that is growing—in a cross-cultural situation—so that I could visit them?” He said he didn't know of any. I asked, “OK, what about a church of *any* denomination or a nondenominational congregation that is reaching out cross-culturally?” He literally said, “We don't talk to them!”

## **My Deepest, Darkest Hour**

In my greatest moment of despair, I received what I believe was a God answer to my prayer.

Remember “junk mail”? I got a postcard that was sent to hundreds of pastors. It was from a seminary in California. It basically said that they had recruited a number of effective career missionaries to teach American pastors. These missionary teachers had all been trained at doctoral levels in “outreach effectiveness” and had served as missionaries in different places all over the world. They now wanted to help pastors become “mission-effective” to the American mission field.

I shared the postcard with my wife, Janet. She replied, “Are you going to go to school the rest of your life?” I responded: “I know I've been in school ever since we met, except this year—at this congregation. But, if the church leaders here will let me, the courses are only two weeks at a time, and you miss only one Sunday at your church. You have to read about 3,500 pages of assigned reading before you go and write a paper that applies to your church, responding to what you have learned, after you return. If you go through the whole program, you have to go three or four times a year for about three years. I just refuse to believe that God doesn't want the people in this community to be reached by our church. I'll go once. If it's not what I'm looking for, what I've been missing, I won't go back.”

The rest is history. It totally changed my life! It changed that church. Yes. I got another degree—Doctor of Ministry. What really matters? I am a missionary! I was able to train many of our people in missiology without ever calling it that!

Today, that is an overflowing, vibrant, African American church—growing with young families. I know, because I recently made another visit there. I was the only white guy in the church—and it was packed. The neighborhood had completely changed racially. The African American pastor introduced me and asked me to come forward and speak to the congregation. I thanked God and wept with joy. The people applauded and I pointed to Jesus. I thanked God for their mission-trained African American pastor-leader, who was standing next to me. If it can happen there, it can happen anywhere. If it can happen anywhere, it can happen at your church.

## **Get Bible *and* Get Going**

Mission isn't simply about “y'all come.” You come to go. Good, comprehensive Bible study is essential. That is a fact! Yet, without an equal focus and equipping for outreach, you are spiritually constipated!

Look at Jesus. He was constantly *doing* mission and *teaching* biblical truth. It was never one without the other. He taught so much *and* trained so well. It was never either/or, but always both/and. He said, “Come,” **and** “Go, make disciples,” who make disciples, who make disciples. **THAT** is a movement. And a movement is not constipated. It's not just about you and me, and it's not just about us. It's about others, your community, your nation, and our world. We are not just consumers to be fed, but also missionaries to reach others.

Here is the fascinating truth about mission outreach—even if it's to your kids or neighbors, or one of your Facebook friends—it will drive you to learn more about Scripture. Mission and Bible truth have a symbiotic relationship that is powerful!

Over the years, those of us at Church Doctor Ministries began gathering and defining basic mission principles that any believer can learn. We taught them to young adults just out of high school. Most of them are scattered throughout the country or have become missionaries in other countries. Some of them are still in our area near the Church Doctor Ministries office. To see them—years later—is an amazing miracle of God. They are missionaries every day, everywhere they go, even in their own country.

The mission training that we did with young adults has also been developed for church members. The training is called SEND—the biblical word for mission. The SEND basic teachings are available online for churches to use with those members who are “ready.” (And God *a/ways* has some members in every church who are ready.) Those who catch the mission vision—and are equipped to do it—recruit friends at church who become “ready.” Every movement begins with a few. Jesus started with 12. It is caught more than taught.

## **The Healthy Church Formula**

It is not rocket science! It is Jesus’ approach: Get people into Scripture **and** help those who are ready, now, to become missionaries to those who are not yet Christians. Your primary mission field includes those in your social network. They are listed in your cell phone.

It all begins with a few who catch the vision. Yet, the vision becomes a mission. A mission to those you already know. Do you have a vision to become a missionary, equipped in mission principles? Constipated believers are much healthier when they “go, make disciples....” Like Jesus said, “As the Father sent me, I *SEND* you.” You can be a missionary and never leave home!

To learn more, visit [www.thesendmovement.com](http://www.thesendmovement.com).