

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.

The Church Doctor® Report provides a quick read of strategic and influential information.

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Permission given to multiply this special issue of hope and opportunities for spiritual growth

Football Player Collapses—The Game Ends: A Commentary on Faith in America

Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin collapses on the field after tackling an opponent in the Buffalo/Cincinnati game. They administer CPR, an ambulance arrives, and the game is canceled. A toy drive fundraiser he was spearheading receives millions of dollars in donations overnight. The following day, on the nightly news, the commentator reports that the family asks that listeners keep Damar in their prayers. And so we should. What do we learn from this?

A spontaneous prayer movement occurred. Not everyone, but many on the field, in the stands, and around the country began to pray. Watching the news afterward, every commentator I saw—on several channels—spoke of Damar with a spiritual overtone. The references to God in prayer were significant. I sent a text to my boss, Tracee, and suggested she watch the news unfold. I added my “Church Doctor analysis” for her to consider. My text said: “Interesting response with all the prayer.” I didn’t say that in sarcasm, but as a spiritual analysis. Tracee returned a text of her own with a similar comment: “...guess when things get bad enough and people have had enough ‘correctness,’ it’s still OK to mention God on TV.” I continued to watch a football stadium in solitude, in prayer.

For the past 30 years, the Church Doctor team has helped hundreds of churches increase their



effectiveness to reach their community for Christ. The Church Doctors are trained and equipped in biblical efforts that increase your congregation’s effectiveness to reach lost people who matter to God.

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God Can Use Football

When I was in high school, I went to church primarily because my dad made me. He required our family to sit in the front row, right under the pulpit. Why? That way I couldn't sleep! My dad knew that I spent most Saturday nights partying late. But he made it clear: "I don't care how late you come home on Saturday night. I'm getting you up for church." And he did!

My "religion"—as a senior in high school—was football. I spent six years, starting in seventh grade, working my way to be a high school football star (at least in my own mind!). By my final high school season, I started on our squad's kickoff team and was immediately clipped by a member of our archrival. The guy who clipped me got a 15-yard penalty. I got knee surgery—and the end of my football "dream."

While I was in the hospital after the surgery, an amazing "God-event" occurred. I laid there with a cast on my leg from my hip to my ankles. In the middle of the night, I was awakened by my roommate, a young man who had a strange physical issue. He would suddenly just stop breathing. It occurred around 3 a.m. He woke me up—gasping for breath. I pressed my call button. It seemed like forever before the nurses arrived with a breathing machine. My roommate almost died. They barely saved him. He was my age—and he came close to death.

I never gave a thought that I might die. Yet, there I lay thinking, "if I died tonight, I don't think I'd go to heaven. In fact, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't."

In that moment, I decided to trust in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. A few minutes later, I concluded: If I'm going to be a believer, I'm going to do it a hundred percent. I decided I'd become a pastor. (I had no clue how someone became a minister.) Then I prayed—for the first time in a long time. I talked to God about the kid in my room who almost died in a bed about four feet away from me. I gave my life to Jesus.

The next morning, my pastor came to visit. I told him I wanted to become a pastor like him. He looked at me as if he had just seen a miracle. That makes sense. It was a miracle!

America in a Time of Challenge

This is a hard time in history. From Ukraine to COVID to inflation to politics to fentanyl to violence to shootings, to—you get it. Or do you?

Times of disruption are moments of receptivity. After all, God, by definition, can do or allow whatever He wants. In spite of that, Jesus shows up—God in person—at a time when Israel, the Holy Land, was ruled by nasty pagans, the feared Romans. They were known for crucifying people—for heaven's sake! And of course, Jesus was killed that way—for heaven's sake!

Do you know what I think about at this current time in history? Having worked with churches, pastors, and church leaders for decades, I wonder: Why don't more Christians see the amazing opportunity to reach people for Jesus and grow their church at a time of such chaos? It's not rocket science! When people far from God are disrupted by the world around them, they are receptive.

So, why don't more churches learn mission principles to take advantage of this "perfect storm"? You see, in my pastoral life, I face disruptions. Yes, there was a time when, in reality, "I once was lost." But, "now I'm found." Because I'm found, I went to college, seminary, and grad school and ended up as pastor of a declining church in the inner city of Detroit.

My disruption was this: “I wanted to reach people for Jesus.” Yet, I never learned—in all that theological training—what are called *mission principles*. Why not?

I believe it’s because we inherited an American church world that—for the most part—thinks that the mission field is *only* “over there” somewhere. So, we don’t train most of our pastors in mission principles. So, those pastors can’t equip their people in mission principles.

If you know of a church in the area where you live that is really healthy, vibrant, and growing—and there are some—consider this: That pastor—or some leader—somehow learned mission principles. And that pastor has trained a good portion of the people in that church in mission thinking.

For heaven’s sake—literally—in this disruptive time when people far from God are receptive, get trained in mission principles. It’s not rocket science. And you will experience the most thrilling time of your life. Your church will grow. Your faith will be recharged. God will use you to change the eternal destiny of others by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Think of the disruptive forces in our country and in our world. While no one likes them, consider the influence those forces have that bring receptivity to people who are far from God. You’ve seen a great snapshot in the collapse of Damar Hamlin on the field. You’ve seen a revelation as Americans stand up for faith and concern. And as you reflect on this amazing story of Damar, remember what Jesus said to His followers: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37). Can you believe that? Can you see where God is moving, working, and blessing? Can you be a part of that? Will your church rise to the opportunity? When things are at their worst, God is at His best, especially when His people stand up in faith.