

**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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## **Calamity Clarifies: How God Will Use You Now**

If you're a "God watcher," you look at every aspect of life from the perspective of the mission. It's true: Many Christians do not. It's way too easy to become a Christian consumer, not a missionary (or witness) for Jesus.

I understand: Many Christians are freaked out about "evangelism." It is hard to believe: During this *season of receptivity*, many churches are not growing. Many are "aging" as well. Yet, most Christians pass by churches that *are* growing every week.

Some Christians are suspect about those growing churches. I know; I've interviewed hundreds of church members. Most don't know the differences among congregations. Some look at those effective churches as providing "gimmicks" or "watering down the truth." Generally, that is unfair, judgmental, and not accurate.

My greatest frustration, challenge, and disappointment? How can declining and aging churches not get help? Some pastors say, "Our people don't like change." In truth, most believers would rather "suffer" through changes than see their church die. Yet, the pattern continues.

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missionary to churches where the leaders want to be more effective to reach lost people for Jesus." He has written numerous books, including *Who Broke My Church? 7 Proven Strategies for Renewal and Revival*. Church Doctor Ministries is led by Tracee Swank, contributing author of several of Kent's books.

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## Thank God for Calamity

We live in one of the most disruptive times in recent history. Likely, life hasn't been this stressed since World War II. You already know the indicators. On the global scale, war in Ukraine and tensions with the superpowers of Russia and China. Locally, the tensions and difficulties connected with politics. Morally, the incredible pain and suffering as a result of gun violence—including the shooting at the Christian elementary school in Tennessee. And then there's COVID. Is there anyone still alive who hasn't lost a friend or loved one to the pandemic?

In Romans 8:28, there is an incredible statement: “*We know* that in everything God works for good with those who love him...” Really? It's an amazing truth. But there is the rest of the verse: “...who are called according to his purpose” (Revised Standard Version).

You'd be hard-pressed to find an active Christian who would debate about the truth of the first half of that verse. You'd be challenged to discover how many believers are not clear about being “...called according to his purpose.” Scripture continues in verse 29, “...those whom he...conformed to the image of h Son.”

“Conformed”—formed into the image of Jesus. If we are formed in the image of Jesus, it means we are a woman, we are a man, we are a child: on a mission—like Jesus, with Jesus. Then, in verse 31, Paul writes, “If God is for us, who is against us?” The obvious answer is “no one.” Verse 35: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The obvious answer: “No one! Nothing!” So, how in the world can a group of Christians, a church, a denomination—any bunch of believers—be relatively ineffective? Based on the results, how can we ever be *ineffective* in reaching our corner of the world for Jesus Christ? How can we tolerate a plateaued and declining church? Aging and declining denominations? One thing is sure: It's not God's fault.

## Calamity Clarifies—Receptivity Rises

With all the challenges of our present world, your unchurched friends, relatives, neighbors, and coworkers are more receptive to the love, forgiveness, and hope of Jesus than they realize. Do *you* know that? If so, what are you going to do about it?

Don't blame our secular, disrupted, chaotic world. Think about when Jesus came to this world. He was born a Jew. He was a citizen of Israel. Yet, the country was occupied by the Romans. The Jews were about as disrupted as any group on the planet. Israel was the “Promised Land,” given to the Jews by God Himself. And it was overrun by pagans who taxed them. Can you imagine? Romans, who crucify people and stand around and laugh? The Jews had to be petrified with fear. They had every right to despise the Romans who took over God's country. Why would God show up in Jesus then? *Calamity clarifies*. When things are at their worst, God is at His best. (Consider writing that down and putting it somewhere that will remind you: “When things are at their worst, God is at His best.”)

Remember: God is, well, God—not a magician. He chooses to work through people. It worked with most of the 12 disciples. But not Judas. It worked with many believers. Yet, not Paul—at

least at first. He was a “late adopter.” If you are in that category, you’re not alone!

Are you a “late adopter”? Have you not yet been transformed beyond being a church member? Are you not yet a missionary for Jesus? Is your church a platform primarily for those who are already believers? That is not bad. It’s just not enough. If that’s the case, why is that? I know. I’ve been there.

## **My Confession—and Transformation**

I was raised in a family of strong, active Christians. My parents were solid believers. Me? Not so much. I was more interested in football and parties. But, in my senior year, Jesus got ahold of my heart through my knee. It was a football injury that led to surgery.

In my hospital room, there was another kid who had a serious problem with his lungs. He would just stop breathing. The doctors had him on a breathing machine. One night, he woke me up, gasping for air. I pressed the call button, and the doctors saved him. I thought, “Wow, a person my age *can* die.” Then I thought, “I’m not spiritually ready—by any means.” God touched my life. The next morning, my pastor visited me, and I told him I wanted to become a minister. I think he nearly passed out!

I went through four years at a Christian college and four years of seminary. At graduation, I decided to continue in graduate school. It wasn’t because I wanted a PhD. It was because, in eight years, I learned a lot, but almost nothing about how to reach people for Jesus.

Three years later, I reached the end, got the degree, and still didn’t learn much about how to reach lost people. I was placed in an inner-city church in Detroit with over 300 members. The church had decreased by 67 percent during the previous 10 years. After a year of trying everything I knew—and seeking help from my denomination—the church was still declining. I did about 50 funerals a year (and got good at that!). Calamity clarifies!

One day, I got some junk mail that offered mission training for active pastors—two weeks at a time, three times a year, for three years. Since nothing else was working for the growth of our church, the elders agreed to let me go—at my own expense. They were desperate. So was I!

Our church started to grow, and today—decades later—it is a thriving inner-city church. Calamity clarifies—and receptivity rises. Look, you should know: God wants your church to reach unbelievers for Jesus and bring them into your congregation.

## **What Is God Saying to You?**

You should be clear about this: It’s not your fault. It’s not your pastor’s fault. However, it is your opportunity to get equipped for the mission field America has become. You don’t have to leave your job. You don’t have to go overseas. You don’t have to be an evangelist if that’s not your gift. Every Christian can be trained in mission tactics.

If your church is plateaued or declining—if you haven’t figured out how to reach your unchurched neighbor, coworker, or your own adult children—remember this: *Calamity clarifies*. What is God saying to you? And what are you going to do about it? This could be your greatest adventure.