

**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.**

(To sign up: email [tracee@churchdoctor.org](mailto:tracee@churchdoctor.org))

## Breakthrough Strategy: Meet a Need, Share Your Faith, Grow Your Church

The newscast I was watching captured my attention about the challenges of life these days. I was immersed in thoughts about the war in Ukraine, a coup in Africa, political unrest in Washington, and threats from China. “What a mess,” I thought, as my phone—on vibrate—began to interrupt.

“Oh, it’s my son, Jon”—who is also our pastor.

“Hi, Jon, what’s up?”

“Hey, Dad,” he replied, “I was wondering if you could preach for me a week from next Sunday.”

I made a quick thought journey through the next 10 days and concluded Jon’s reason for asking: The Thursday and Friday before that Sunday was the Global Leadership Summit. Both of us were registered for the local satellite site in a nearby city. I had two thoughts: “He is pretty good at planning ahead—but not too far ahead,” and “How do you say ‘no’ to your kid—and your pastor?”

“Yeah, sure, I can do that,” I said. “What’s the text?”

I knew he was preaching through the Gospel of Mark. I also reflected privately, “He’s a really good preacher for his age. I’ll have to work hard to measure up.”

He replied, “It’s Mark 4:35-41, about Jesus calming the storm.”

Kent R. Hunter is an enthusiastic missionary focused on helping Christians to look in the mirror, point to themselves with both



thumbs, and say, “I am a missionary.” Kent says, “You don’t have to cross the sea; just see the cross.” Kent’s passion is to help followers of Jesus follow Him in the mission and ignite their churches to effectively reach others for eternity. He is the author of 35 books, three of which are available just this month: *A Nation Reclaims Respect: One Person at a Time*; *The Amazing Power of God Stories: Share What God Has Done in Your Life*; *Church Politics: Pain-Free Decision-Making*. Kent is the founder of Church Doctor Ministries, now led by Dr. Tracee J. Swank.

[www.churchdoctor.org](http://www.churchdoctor.org)  
Email Kent: [kenthunter@churchdoctor.org](mailto:kenthunter@churchdoctor.org)

## About Storms

Furious storms get our attention. In Mark 4, Jesus directs His disciples to leave the crowds and head across the Sea of Galilee to the other side. A furious storm came up and frightened His disciples. Jesus was asleep on a cushion.

The disciples woke up Jesus and said, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

Jesus rebuked the wind and said, “Quiet! Be still.” The wind died down, and it was completely still. Yet, that is not the end of the story. Jesus said to the disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey Him!”

Christians recite the Lord’s Prayer and say, “Your Kingdom come...” (Matthew 6:10). Yet, how many church members think much about the faith dimension of that Kingdom? Jesus said, “Seek first the Kingdom of God...” (Matthew 6:33). Kingship is all about the absolute power of Jesus. To be a citizen of the Kingdom shapes our values and priorities.

Our growth journey in this Kingdom goes beyond our personal salvation. As members of His Kingdom, Jesus’ power is available to all believers—in our lives and ministries. God empowers us to be change agents. This is the mission dimension of the believer—and the local church.

“Storms” in life represent a receptive platform for outreach. Nobody “likes” storms. We can’t control them. Some are political. Others are social. Some are weather-related—as the disciples faced on the Galilean Sea.

One thing is clear: Storms provide an environment of spiritual receptivity. Even those who have no faith background occasionally speak in spiritual terms: “It seems like the whole world is going to hell.” What does that mean? It signals they might be more receptive!

What does that communicate to you? How does that speak to your church? In what sense is God nudging those of us who are Christians to reach out to those in our social networks?

## What They Teach Missionaries

Ironically, few pastors in Western cultures are trained in the discipline of *missiology*. Some get training in evangelism. Yet, that is a small part of the biblical teaching of mission. Why don’t all pastors get trained as missionaries, even if they never leave their own country?

After years of observation, I’m convinced that most established denominations drift, over time, from mission to maintenance. The result? The *movement* aspect of Christianity drifts toward management. Pastors are trained to maintain churches. The mission dimension that was the centerpiece and driving force for the apostles is often limited to an evangelism program for the few who have that particular spiritual gift. In most churches, that would be about one in 10 of the membership.

In my own training for ministry, I spent four years at a Christian college and three years in seminary training—with an additional internship at a church. After those eight years of training, I knew almost nothing about the biblical discipline of missiology.

When my seminary years were finished, I opted for graduate school. It was my hope that another three years—at the highest level—would teach me how to be a “missionary” to those

who don't know Jesus. Further, my vision was that I could equip the members of a church to effectively reach others for Jesus. Three years later, I received a PhD in theology, but still had almost no training in the biblical discipline of missiology. In fact, I have discovered that most pastors don't get training in mission strategy unless they are called to be *foreign* missionaries.

Over the last several decades of working with pastors, I learned this: *Most denominations have subtly defined the "mission field" as somewhere **over there***. This lie has crippled thousands of pastors with the inability to equip Christians to grow their churches. The result is an increasingly secular society. Christianity is losing ground, losing the country. This is true, not only in the US, but wherever this mission failure exists.

## **Trained to Maintain**

In my journey, I exhausted every level of training my denomination offered. I had earned a bachelor's degree in ministry, a Master of Divinity degree, and a PhD. I was sent by my denomination to a church in the inner city of Detroit. It had declined 67 percent in the previous 10 years. It was an all-white church in a neighborhood that was 40 percent African American. There were no African Americans who attended the church, not even the several families who lived across the street from the church building. We could not reach them because I had never learned mission strategy.

Everything we tried failed to reach our growing, cross-cultural community. I called our regional mission executive and asked for help. He said, "We have already closed several churches in that same situation in the Detroit area, and yours will likely close as well. We really don't know what to do in that situation."

I refused to believe our unchurched African American neighbors could not be reached for Jesus. So, I contacted my denomination's leader of national missions. And, at that time, I received the same response!

Then, one day, I received a notice that was sent to pastors all across America. It was from a school in California that had hired a staff of former pastors who had been trained to be missionaries. They were equipped with missiology. They were sent to places all over the world. They had advanced degrees in the discipline of biblical missions. They were successful in growing cross-cultural mission work. Each had agreed to return to this California school and teach *missiology* to American pastors who were willing to learn. For three years, I went for two intensive weeks at a time, three times each year. I read numerous books that were assigned before I went and wrote a paper that reflected mission strategy for my church. I had to send that paper to my professor, who graded it. In the process, I became a missionary to my own country. Mission training transformed my life—and that church.

## **Theological Breakthrough**

One of the professors at this mission school was Dr. Paul Hiebert. He taught about the theological

breakthrough of the “excluded middle.”

At the first of a three-tiered focus of biblical mission teaching was *the ultimate meaning and purpose of life*. It is an important part of the spiritual journey. It is commonly found in most American churches. Most pastors get that in their training. You might call it “Spiritual Life 101 for church members.”

The *third tier* of biblical mission teaching was on the focus of what Hiebert called “technology”: *educational, medical, and agricultural* mission teaching. That teaching is all about meeting needs. Many pastors and their churches do that very well.

However, the *middle tier*—which has often been excluded—focuses on the *daily crises of life*: illness, weather, industry-related issues, political turmoil, raising children, etc. This area focuses on the role of the Holy Spirit applied to daily crises. From a mission perspective, this is often excluded. Expectant prayer is an essential aspect of the Christian faith and life. This is a powerful element for effective mission.

Most of the miracles performed by Jesus and the disciples focus on *issues of survival*. The role of the Holy Spirit is important in aiding believers in daily crises. Expectant prayer is an essential aspect of Christian faith and life. This is a key element applied to effective mission outreach to those who are unchurched. This mission strategy is about how God meets our most challenging needs. So, we asked our African American neighbors what our church could do to help them. Almost everyone said, “We need a good grade school for our children.” So, we started school with eight grades and kindergarten. Our church grew—cross-culturally.

The primary and most important element for effective mission is this: God still acts in our lives and for our welfare. He is active and alive in human history and in the lives of His people. In the storms of life, Jesus shows up and brings calm. What if every Christian could articulate that to those in their social network from a personal perspective?

This sounds like a cliché, but it is accurate: If Christian believers get real about the power and presence of God, we would see great breakthrough among unbelievers and increased impact on our culture. How important is that right now?

Here is the good news: Any Christian can learn the biblical basics of missiology. Pastors and church leaders can disciple congregational members to be missionaries. In our work as “Church Doctors,” church leaders often ask how we came to discover practical and biblical ways to reach unbelievers and grow their churches. They use our resources and find new ways to do church. They often make a connection to the mission dimensions from the New Testament. Some of them wonder, “How do you know that?” The short answer? It is *applied missiology*—the biblical application of effective mission strategy. It works, just as you see it throughout the New Testament. It begins when you reframe your church as a mission and discover that the person you see in the mirror is a missionary. It is the beginning of a spiritual revolution.

How important is that for you—and your church? You see, storms can be your opportunity for reaching people for Jesus.