

## Book Review

### **Jurie Kriel, *Hitting the Ball You Cannot See: Accelerating Jesus-Following into the Future***

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The author Jurie Kriel and his colleagues have encouraged the Church to look into the future, as digitalization has redefined our lives: How we live (experiential), How the world works (structural), and How we connect (relational).

#### **Hitting the Ball**

If a ball is pitched at 90 miles per hour, it takes about 425 milliseconds to reach the bat. “For the batter, however, it takes roughly 200 milliseconds to visually process the pitch, 275 milliseconds for the brain to send the signal to the muscles, and another 150 milliseconds to complete the swing—totaling 625 milliseconds. That’s 167 milliseconds too late. Biologically and physically impossible—yet, every week, thousands of these ‘impossible’ hits are made” (21). Christians should be pioneers, taking risks, and be like the baseball (and cricket) players who hit speeding balls. Pioneers venture into the unknown with a childlike wonder and willingness to embrace new possibilities, innovate, or find alternate methods. “As believers, we are often trying to hit the ball where it was, or even was, but maybe faithfulness is learning to swing where the ball will be” (22).

#### **Strong Winds of Change**

Artificial Intelligence, biotechnology, and societal movements challenge traditional notions of human identity and value. Innovation, adaptation in spiritual formation, collaboration, and cross-cultural understanding are needed to fulfill the Great Commission. Like a ship exposed in an open sea, we have to skillfully trim sails and adjust the course using a rudder, our agency and sails, our discernment and strategic choices.

#### **Advice for Older Leaders**

“Don’t abdicate leadership, abandon experience, or simply capitulate responsibility to the most willing. Instead, team up with and champion those most focused on, and graced for, the future: the young” (11).

#### **The Cone of Possibility**

There are five kinds of perspectives for the future; disciples are called to be proactive and make a preferable future to happen:

- 1) Possible (Future knowledge: “might happen”)
- 2) Plausible (Current knowledge: “could happen”)
- 3) Probable (Current trends: “likely to happen”)
- 4) Projected (Default extrapolation: “most probable”)

### 5) Preferable (Desired future: “want to happen”)

This desirable future is possible by faith in Sovereign God, knowing His will, discerning the times, and taking bold steps towards the desired future.

### Leadership

Leadership is moving people from A to B. Position A is current understanding, comfort zones, and established ways of doing things. Position B is the preferable future: the foresight, vision, the desired destination for the Church in an evolving world. Leadership is to influence and guide individuals and communities toward the preferred end. “Raise Leaders. Reach Generations” (17).

### Gospel Is Simple

“The gospel is simple and profound to essence. It appeals to every human being because it meets the heart’s deepest needs” (15). Truth remains constant, love will always remain relevant in the digital age that has amplified, not diminished, humanity’s longing for connection and life-on-life relationships. In the world of noise, the gospel, free of fluff, must be shared as truth and not opinion, with humility and authenticity by being present.

### Valuable Lessons

Thomas Edison turned setbacks in his experiments into valuable lessons. Similarly, we need to pause, re-calibrate, and discern whether our failures are leading us closer to or further away from our true mission.

### Relevance Deficit

There is an unprecedented acceleration of knowledge. “In 1900, collective knowledge doubled every 100 years, by 1942, every 25 years’ by 1982, every 13 months, and today, it is believed to double every 12 hours” (22). When the pace of change outside the individual or organization exceeds the pace of change within, relevance deficit sets in, that results in a loss of connection. Strategies, approaches, and methods are valued above mission and considered sacred, irrelevance is the result. However, the focus should be the ultimate goal and being in step with the Spirit.

### Catalysts that Bring Change

There are four catalysts that bring about change:

- 1) Crisis: Incidents like world wars or pandemics. The recent COVID pandemic accelerated video conferencing and remote work.
- 2) Disruption: Unlike crisis, disruption is a gradual process.
- 3) Innovation: Self-initiated action, which leads to personal and collective growth and improvement.
- 4) Obedience: Acts like Martin Luther’s 95 Theses profoundly shaped the course of history.

Understanding Change Quadrants helps us to stay relevant. These quadrants are determined by two axes: changing/unchanging; known/unknown:

- 1) Stability: Unknown/Unchanging
- 2) Leverage: Known/Unchanging

- 3) Confusion: Unknown/Changing
- 4) Response: Known/Changing.

## Current Location to Destination

“When we receive a call from someone who is lost, our first step is to ask about their current location. We can only lead people to a destination, if we first understand where they are” (27). A leader should know the present, discerning shifts and trends, and leading with clarity and purpose. Learning to anticipate is a skill of an effective leader. Today’s turbulence cannot be dealt with through yesterday’s logic. It is not about speed or faster reflexes, but sharper foresight; not reaction, but anticipation and preemptive action, remembering the Kingdom is not about speed, but being rooted.

## Human Understanding

Humans are rational beings, designed to think, reason, and make sense of the world. Then the Renaissance elevated the human body as a symbol of beauty and perfection; next came the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution—which gave new power of understanding. Now it is an age of post-humanism, and transhumanism. “Technological advances—particularly artificial intelligence (AI) and biotechnology—reshape how society views identity, value, and existence” (37).

## Complexity of Identity

Is it possible for AI to create AI? Identity is no longer a just struggle but is now a full-blown crisis. Earlier generations would ask: Who am I? or What is my purpose? Why am I like this? Humanity’s self-definition across eras have been as follows:

- 1) I survive, therefore, I am.
- 2) I make, therefore, I am. Making of fire, wheels, tools.
- 3) I think, therefore, I am.
- 4) I feel, therefore, I am.
- 5) I create, therefore I am. Artistic expression.

The astonishing fact is that surviving, making, thinking, and feeling now could be replicated by AI. What is my purpose, if machines could do it all? Machines may one day replicate, rival, or surpass our cognitive abilities.

The complexity of identity is shaped by overlapping factors like race, gender, and class. Young people think that identity is infinitely customizable. When truth is spoken in love, young people want to fact-check online. AI, gender, and genetic editing and design reflect the ongoing struggle of humanity regarding insecurity and lack of identity. Human fluidity of image is caused digitally through filters and avatars, and physically through augmentation and medical procedures. The more we stare at ourselves, the more we reinvent ourselves, the more we replace ourselves, the less we truly know who we are. “Our true identity is found not in what we create or achieve but in the image of God in which we are made” (45).

## Human Beings or Programmable Beings

Culture sees humans as programmable beings shaped by external forces rather than distinct creations of God. Mistakenly, culture asserts that we are born good but corrupted by oppression. Life's purpose is self-expression and self-improvement through social and technological progress.

### **Sin and Guilt**

For this generation, the appeal of the gospel often diminishes when the focus centers on sin and guilt. “The desirability of the gospel weakens when it is presented primarily as a warning of punishment and eternal damnation to a society convinced it holds control over its own destiny” (41). Gospel sharing should move beyond the guilt, shame, and punishment narrative and convey a radically different understanding that is grounded in the eternal, unchanging truth of God’s image and purpose. This generation does not seek certainty, but clarity. This is a generation that values openness and authenticity over knowledge and authority. By admitting we do not have all the answers is an authentic witness. That invites people to join the journey of faith. “They need an authentic expression of God’s love, rooted in humility and delivered clearly” (42).

### **Divine Origin**

“The truth is that the Creator alone defines His creation, and our highest human identity transcends humanity itself, beginning with His divinity” (43). What is a cake? The parts are layers, icing, and decorations. Its ingredients are flour, sugar, and eggs. The processes are mixed, whipped, and baked. But a cake is more than parts, ingredients, and processes. Today’s description of humans revolve around perceptions, descriptions, ingredients, and processes yet never address the core of human identity at its highest level: our origin.

### **Church Focus**

In the ever-updating digitalized world, the Church must focus on three transcendent truths:

- 1) The Image of God: AI may outpace human intelligence, but it will never surpass the wisdom or sovereignty of God.
- 2) The Spiritual reality: Humans are not merely emotional or rational, but spiritual. Knowing God and being known by God is central.
- 3) The Eternal perspective: Identity and purpose remain secure in God’s eternal reality.

### **What Does It Mean To Be Human?**

The gospel vision is rooted in a relationship with God, empowered by Christ’s redemption, and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. In a time when innovation often overshadows introspection, the gospel invites humanity to pause, reflect, and return to its Creator.

### **Digital Existence**

“Our digital lives are not just a tool but a defining aspect of our reality, reshaping how we communicate, form our identities, and even perceive truth” (50). Three shifts:

- 1) The dawn of Artificial Intelligence
- 2) The abundance of clean energy
- 3) The frontiers of bioengineering (synthetic biology)

AI is about to get physical. Dull, dirty, and dangerous jobs would be done by AI.

## Human Attention

Nobel Laureate Herbert A. Simon: “He predicted a future where the value of information itself would approach zero, while the value of attention would steadily increase.” Human attention is a scarce commodity. For Jesus followers: “Existence in the digital age revolves around three essential truths: digitalization is neutral, authenticity is critical, and relationships remain central” (54). The nature of scarcity has shifted, fundamentally altering the dynamics of supply and demand, particularly within the realm of information and technology.

The First Age: The Scarcity of Information

The Second Age: The Scarcity of Application

The Third Age: The scarcity of Interaction and Experience.

Hence for disciples of the Lord: “The focus must shift from guarding information or delivering application to cultivating interaction and designing transformative experiences” (56).

## The Digital Rebellion

It is a surprising fact that Gen Z are drawn back to the physicality of the Bible. This “digital rebellion” isn’t a rejection of technology, but perhaps a subconscious yearning for something authentic and unchanging in a fluid digital world. “For the Church, this presents an opportunity to bridge the digital, and physical, recognizing that while digital platforms can open doors, the enduring power of the Word often resonates profoundly in its physical form” (58).

## Gospel Remains Incarnational

“An information-centric gospel presentation, which might have thrived in the Age of Information Scarcity, risks getting lost in the deluge of digital context” (58). The future may be digital, but the gospel remains incarnational. Digital first world considers digital and physical words as equally authentic.

## Democratization of Information

The digital world has democratized information. “Crucially, this places the ‘majority world’ on a more equal footing in how the gospel is shared and received” (59). Hence global missions have to be more decentralized, and use collaborative methods, to recognize the Spirit of God moves freely through Digital space in a Digital age.

## Digital Progress

The first generation were Digital explorers who tried to grasp and understand. The second were Digital immigrants who adapted to the technology gradually. The third, the Digital Natives, are comfortable, immersed, and welded to the device. In a survey, some teenagers ranked the Internet as a priority over water.

## Trust Deficit

“A loss of certainty in our own identities has led to a collapse of trust in the institution that once provided stability” (70). The world has become polarized and untrusting. Like the Bell Curve: “The ideological center has collapsed, and the population has polarized toward extreme ends, leaving the middle ground virtually inhabited” (70). Five reasons for the polarization of society:

- 1) Information flow used to be centralized and shared reality; now it presents a fragmented and fractured reality.
- 2) Public discourse was moderated consensus; now polarized extremes.
- 3) Institutions: There was high trust in institutions; now low trust.
- 4) Range of opinions: Once they were clustered around the middle; now clustered around opposite poles.
- 5) Social cohesion: Earlier there were strong social ties; now eroding social cohesion.

People want to only listen to information according to their ideological alignment. When a community is fractured and institutions are questioned, the church should represent truth and humility, so that people could trust, and then believe.

Trust comes through genuine presence and authentic connection. Young people are not walking away from truth, but from trust. Trust has been relocated from pulpits to personal experience, relationships, and community. Young people need presence and not programs. Trust begins in places young people actually live; not in theological debates but in conversation, curiosity, and community. Going, loving, and listening builds trust. There is a longing for truth. Hence, the Church's invitation is: Show up. Listen well. Love deeply. Speak clearly. Be present. Authenticity still shines, and transparency is deeply attractive.

There are four major schools of thought about defining truth:

- 1) Consensus: It is True because we agree.
- 2) Practical: It is true because it works.
- 3) Relative: It depends: Is it true for me.
- 4) True in itself: A priori, fundamental, undeniable aspect of reality.

The Parable of the Sower attests to these different schools: "On the path (consensus), among the thorns (practical), the shallow ground (relative). However, the parable doesn't end there. There is the good soil (true in itself)" (80). The Bible is the most read and best seller: true by consensus. It is practical and transforms people. Relativism does not yield good fruit, and there is good soil that yields fruit. Choose the truth, the ultimate reality, and take refuge in Him.

### **Wrong Comparison**

People trust Starbucks because they know what to expect, no matter the city or country. But churches? Even within the same denomination, congregations can vary dramatically. (To offer a word of critique here, the author has failed to understand uniformity is not the goal of the Church.)

### **Shifting Ground**

Blockbuster Video had 9000 stores around the world. Netflix came and established itself by collecting data, refining algorithms, and building a foundation for a future where content would be streamed directly into homes, eliminating physical stores entirely. Now Blockbuster has just one store with a meagre business.

In pursuit of cheap labor, a shoe company reached a village in a faraway country. Now one robot replaced a village and a factory came to the developed world. Globalization shifted to automation and localization.

### **Rich and Poor Divide**

It is important to bring have nots and haves together. Empowering the have nots is a critical mission. It is making a strategic shift from macro-influence to micro-stewardship. “True empowerment means engaging people’s intellectual gifts and creativity, not just their physical labor or financial contributions” (95).

### **Moving from Independence to Interdependence**

The Body of Christ has shared consciousness and the strength of the braided rope, mobilizing all from being spectators to participants. There are four keys to accelerate the transformation of culture in the midst of transactional culture:

- 1) Become the shoulders that others stand on.
- 2) Take the risk and pay the price for people to take the next step.
- 3) Give away responsibility, not just tasks.
- 4) Attract consumers, but do not leave them that way but lead them to higher purposes.

### **Paradox of Proximity**

The Digital generation is more connected but also more isolated and lonely. In fact, there is only the illusion of connection. What the entire TV industry produces is done by YouTube in a single day. The explosion of content is because of a deep human desire to be seen, to be heard, and to connect—but on one’s own terms. ‘In a world defined by shifting degrees of separation and a pervasive paradox of proximity, the Church is called to master a set of skills that rebuild authentic connection” (109).

### **Rows and Circles**

Dan Blythe: “Rows can’t ask questions, Rows can’t wrestle with doubt. Rows can’t build trust. Circles can” (111). Gen Z’ers do not need a pastor who is cool but one who remembers their name, listens, and loves them. Community is a network of circles where people are seen, heard, known, and discipled. Emphasizing community does not mean to abandon rows, but intentional cultivation of circles. Rows can inform and inspire. Circles connect, trust is built, and true belonging is discovered.

### **Theology of Collaboration**

The Global Church should overcome the “separation paradox.” In every local place a micro-consortium should be formed—and not simply by quoting John 17. The result should be accelerated local fruitfulness and building momentum. Necessary people are “architects of connection—dedicated people who actively match people and projects, forming bridges between aligned missions and emerging needs.

### **Raising High-capacity Leaders**

Leaders need the following:

- 1) Values (Application)
- 2) Vision (Alignment)
- 3) Vehicles (Arranged systems)
- 4) Involvement (Association)

People should be moved from passive consumption of rows to the active participation of circles.

## Third Space

“At its core, the gospel is about relationships—our connection with God and one another” (61). Jesus’s revolution thrived in informal places like coffee shops. Digital tools should enhance and not replace human relationships. Leaders should understand the importance of presence and discernment alongside digital fluency to thrive in the Digital world. The Church is not to create an exclusive club but become a beacon of radical, outward-focused love. Humanity has always sought refuge in a space beyond the confines of home and the demands of work. That search was evidenced in seventeenth-century coffee houses. “For centuries, the Church was the quintessential third place by default in many cultures” (119). That was true not only for worship but also for social leveling, shared rituals, and collective support. Churchgoers have moved away from being a church and have become consumers of church. Religious consumerism, inwardly oriented, and cheap grace has made churches ineffective.

## Involvement and Commitment

A chicken gives an egg—a repeated gift. A pig gives bacon and sausage—a contribution that demands its very life. Commitment is expressed in relationships and participation. A missional church is present for one another. Churches should have these qualities: emotional safety, relational warmth, peace, physical space, inclusive worship, and genuine relationships.

## Toward 2050

An accident became a breakthrough. Alexander Fleming returned after a two-week vacation to find a petri dish contaminated in his lab. He thus discovered penicillin. In churches, in the name of efficiency, petri dishes are being thrown out. There is a need for a lab mentality for agile adaptation:

- 1) Curiosity and hypothesis testing
- 2) Learning from failure
- 3) Data-driven iteration

## Chess or Chinese Checkers

Playing chess needs foresight and planning. Chess demands a profound understanding of interconnectedness, anticipating multiple moves ahead, sacrificing pieces for long term gain, and understanding the intricate consequences of each decision. The mission of the Church is like playing chess.

## Towards the Future

Healthy teams based on truth, trust, and collaboration are needed in churches today. The Church should not be afraid of technologies but learn to leverage them to proclaim the gospel in unimaginable ways. The future of the Church would be shaped not by individual heroes but by a collective, collaborative body that shares knowledge, resources, and a vision for the future.

## Conclusion

This is a stimulating book for thinking Christians to read, reflect on, and bring changes in their own context. For the Global Church to be relevant and dynamic, such prophetic insights are needed. Despite the book’s limited North American viewpoint, it is a must read for all Christians

who love to share the gospel, engage in missions, and fulfill the Great Commission in our generation.