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ALL ACCESS

Speaker after speaker shared about the value of relationships and the strength found when standing arm-to-arm in ministry.



In the movie, “The Queen,” British Prime Minister Tony Blair and his wife, Cherie, are prepared to meet Queen Elizabeth II for the first time after he takes office. A uniformed equerry leads the couple up a grand staircase.

“When we reach the audience room, I will knock. We will not wait to be called, we will go straight inside. Standing by the door, we bow. From the neck. I will introduce you. The Queen will extend her hand, you go to her, bow again, then shake her hand,” the servant says.

And one more thing, “...when you’re in the Presence, at no point must you show your back.

“The ‘Presence?’” Blair queries.

“Yes, Sir. That’s what it’s called, when you’re in her Majesty’s company.”

While there is no royal equivalent in the FGBC, any of our pastors could erect similar barriers. They could easily surround themselves with layers so interruptions would be at a minimum and they could focus more easily on next week’s sermon. It would be simple to not share a home address or lock down a Facebook page.

Jeff Bogue leads our largest Grace Brethren church with not just one campus, but multiple sites – and a vision to begin even more. He’s a sought-after speaker. His opinion is valued. He could protect his privacy in many ways.

Instead, he gives out his cell phone number. And he’s done it more than once.

He encourages people to call him.

That is what I love about the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches and why this year’s Access2017 conference was so significant.

Speaker after speaker shared about the value of relationships and the strength found when standing arm-to-arm in ministry. Particularly meaningful were the “short talks” found in each session, where speakers focused on particular characteristics of access. Dr. Bill Katip talked about the importance of intentionality. Dustin Godshall discussed encouragement. Jennifer Avey looked at the importance of honesty. Kate Ward addressed the importance of humility, including demonstrating physical positions that could demonstrate humility.

It was evidence of a fresh wind of cooperation that is blowing through this network of churches in North America. It was palpable as groups gathered as cohorts -- peer learning groups that were focused around various areas of ministries. It was apparent in the hallways, as individuals gathered to talk between sessions. It was unmistakable at meals, where attendees not only gathered to celebrate what God is doing through national ministries, but to enjoy fellowship over delicious food.

This issue features several of those “short talks,” which are edited for publication. I encourage you to go online at vimeo.com/channels/access2017 to watch all the speakers, plus interviews with church planters and the impressive Stoll Ceremony during the Eagle Commission dinner, where the responsibility of the endorsing officer for the FGBC was passed from Dr. John Schumacher to Dr. Mark Penfold.

Finally, you’ll want to read whether the Grace Brethren should mark the anniversary of the Reformation in a thoughtful piece by one of Grace College’s premier historians, Dr. Jared Burkholder.



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ACCESS FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

by Dustin Godshall

God, in His supernatural ability, He's set up a chain reaction. He's set up people in our lives to go before us to set the example and then to encourage us to do what He's calling us to do.



[CHRIST HAS] SUPERNATURALLY ARRANGED OUR FELLOWSHIP OF CHURCHES. HE'S ARRANGED THE CONNECTIONS AND THE RELATIONSHIPS, AND WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER.



I was 23 years old when I first learned how to play Dominoes. I had just started a one-year internship at Grace Church in Powell, Ohio. My wife and I were playing dominos with Ed and Polly Jackson.

Ed and Polly were in their 70s at the time. They were a sweet, wonderful, godly couple, but they played cutthroat Dominoes. There was not much getting past Polly. She would crush people when playing Dominoes.

Growing up, I thought Dominoes were used for one thing – standing them on end and watching them topple. I didn't know what the numbers were for. I thought you placed them into a chain and tapped them over.

Just as I had to learn how to play Dominoes by the rules, I was sitting around the table with people who were modeling by example what ministry looked like.

At the church, I shared cubicle space with Ed. If you anybody knows Ed, he's a World War II vet, he was an undercover officer for the Ohio State Highway Patrol, then he moved on to church planting in Alaska and Florida, before coaching church planters with Grace Brethren North American Missions.

There was just a short wall between us. I could ask him questions and I could watch. Ed spoke encouragement into my life, matching the example of what he showed me.

The word "encouragement" means to give advice, support, hope, and confidence. That's one meaning of what it means to encourage somebody.

I got to see example matched with encouragement, someone saying, "I believe in you. I believe in what you have. I believe in how you're gifted. I believe in what you can do."

A couple years later, I was now on staff at the Powell church. I heard of a couple of crazy guys named Tony Webb and Nathan Wells. They were just walking around telling people about Jesus. I'm sitting in my office and I'm

doing ministry work, but I'm not telling people about Jesus the way that I knew I should be.

I saw their example and what was happening. I asked Tony, "Can I follow you sometime? Can I watch? Can I be a part of this?"

Tony, along with Nathan, began to encourage me. I did crazy stuff with them -- going into Section 8 housing apartments, knocking on doors, and doing prayer walks. I was reading through the book of John with people in apartments that reeked of marijuana smoke.

I wouldn't have done it without an example or encouragement. It's what I needed to take that step forward. It's what I had to see happen in my life.

As God began to work in my life, I was comfortable. I was in a large church. I loved the staff I served with, and my wife and I loved our lives. But I felt like God was saying, "I want you to go and do something more."

I called a guy who I saw his example -- Clancy Cruise. I asked, "How did you know when it was time to leave [the staff position at] Wooster [and move to Marysville, Ohio to begin a church]?"

We met for coffee. Clancy, with his example, encouraged me. He gave me support, he gave me confidence, he gave me words. He gave me courage to move forward.

Throughout my career, I have seen examples before me. There was encouragement that matched and hope that believed in me.

That is how God has structured the Church to work. The Church is the bride of Christ. It's not mine, it's not yours. It's the bride of Christ.

And so, God, in His supernatural ability, He's set up a chain reaction. He's set up people in our lives to go before us to set the example and then to encourage us to do what He's calling us to do.

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GET PAST THAT. I BELIEVE YOU CAN PUSH PAST IT.
I BELIEVE YOU CAN LEAD PAST IT.”



I believe that’s what our family is about, that’s what Access is about, that’s what we’re about. We want to encourage people.

You’re going to go home and you will experience the conference gap. That’s when you share your idea with the people at your church, and they look at you like you have three heads. “What are you talking about?”

What do they say? “We’ve never done that before. There’s no way that will work. I don’t understand what you’re saying. I can’t picture what you’re saying.”

To make the conference gap close, we have to tell our congregations, “Listen, there’s a church that’s doing it. There’s an example. There’s somebody that we can call, there’s somebody that we can talk to, and they’re going to coach us and give us encouragement.”

They’re going to give us courage, confidence, hope, support, and advice. When we get stuck and we don’t know how to push past stuff, they will be there. They will give us encouragement and we see a chain reaction.

It’s hard when you’re here [at conference] by yourself to go home and try to share this. I am excited I was able to bring seven people to conference from my church in York, Pa., because we’re a small church, but we’re growing.

I went to York, Pa., as a solo pastor. Each weekday morning, I sit in my car and look at the building. “I’m the only person going into that church today.” I approach the building, I take out the key and unlock the door. I turn on the light switch and I sit at my desk. I’m like, “What am I supposed to do now?”

It’s a change, it’s different. But I get on my phone and I start calling people and I start working with people [throughout the Fellowship]. I start talking and saying, “What is it...? How can I...? Where can I...?”

I’m received with huge support and encouragement from fellow pastors – men like Scott Feather or Tim Hodge, who have been beside me as I’ve ventured into this new step in

my life. Because I could see their example, I knew they cared and were investing in me, and it made me more successful.

That’s the way God has prearranged the Church. We need to encourage each other. We need to say, “Listen, here’s my example. Here’s where I was, and I believe you can get past that. I believe you can push past it. I believe you can lead past it.”

This church I’m pastoring is not mine. It’s Christ’s. He’s supernaturally arranged our Fellowship of churches. He’s arranged the connections and the relationships, and we are stronger together.

As you go home, don’t let the conference gap stall down the vision that God has been placing in your hearts. Leverage technology. Leverage relationships.

Keep at it because God wants to use your church to reach more people for Jesus, and you can’t let things stand in your way. You’ve got to network, you’ve got to support each other, you’ve got to invest in each other.

When I say, “I need help, I need this, I need that.” I even get more on top of that, given things I didn’t even ask for. Because we’re a group that loves to bless each other. We love to take care of each other. That’s who we are.

We close the conference gap with encouragement. We offer support, we offer advice, we offer hope. With our words, we put courage into people so they can take the next step forward. And that’s what I’m excited to do as I go home because I’ve been equipped with relationships. And that’s what this conference has been all about. It’s been about encouraging each other to see God do more in our lives.

Dustin Godshall has been the pastor of Grace Brethren Church, York, Pa., since 2014. He and his wife, Kelly, have three children. This is an edited version of his talk at Access2017, the national conference of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, which was held in Fremont, Ohio, July 25-27, 2017.

THE POSTURE OF HUMILITY

by Kate Ward

When we do ministry,
when we go into a
situation to love and
serve someone else,
our posture reflects
our humility with the
people we are either
serving with or serving.



BECAUSE OF MY EXCITEMENT AND PASSION, MY HUMILITY WAS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT.



“When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (NIV)

I am a mom of three kids, aged 10 and under, so if anyone knows humility, it is a parent. Now maybe it is a forced humility, but kids can sure break down your pride. They make you question everything you know. They also make you not want to judge any other parent because you know how hard the job truly is.

When I think of humility, I think about posture. When a person wants to show respect or humility to someone, they will either bow or kneel. When we do ministry, when we go into a situation to love and serve someone else, our posture reflects our humility with the people we are either serving with or serving.

Five years ago, my husband, John and I, and our boys, moved from Columbus, Ohio to Atlanta, Ga., with Encompass World Partners. To say the least, we were excited for our new mission field. I think my posture was a little bit like standing on a chair. Now don’t get me wrong, I didn’t think I knew all the answers or had everything figured out, but because of my excitement and passion, my humility was almost non-existent. That is the funny thing about pride, we mostly equate it to thinking we are better than others, but sometimes it comes from good intentions that just make us not good learners or observers. We are too excited to be effective.

Fast-forward a couple of months, and I started looking a lot more like someone slouching in a chair. It is humorous how exhaustion can humble you. There were so many needs, different cultures, and much to learn. About a year into our time in Atlanta, I heard a sermon that changed how I look at and do ministry. It

was a sermon on Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Growing up, I was taught that the moral to this story was that Jesus made time for a lowly, sinful, woman who was from a group of people that Jews normally didn’t cross paths with. So we should be kind to the sinners around us or the people who are not like us.

But this pastor highlighted how Jesus empowered this woman right where she was, and gave her honor while sharing truth. It wasn’t about what he did, it was about her. He humbled himself enough to take what was considered the filth of the earth, a pagan woman in that day, and talked with her from a posture that was like sitting on the ground with legs crossed.

First, he shared with her his need and he asked for her help. He was thirsty and he needed water. I am sure if Jesus had really wanted to, he could have gotten his own water. But he wanted to engage this woman in a way that would open her to what he wanted to tell her and immediately show her value.

I can’t tell you how many of my relationships have flourished over me just being vulnerable, whether with a follower of Jesus or with someone that doesn’t yet know Him. Allowing someone to see my struggle or my needs, and then asking them to help, breaks down barriers, and deepens a relationship quicker than hours of time together. It gives people worth and shows them they are needed.

Secondly, he talked to her, well actually, let her talk, and ask questions. And he listened. How many times do we walk into a situation where we want to share Jesus with people and before we set foot in the room, we already know what the problem and the solution is for these people that we haven’t even met?

My kids go to a school where more than 20 different languages are spoken by the parents of the students. God has truly given me a heart for these international families, but several times, I have tried to implement programs to serve them and none of the families have shown any interest. But when I take time to talk with these families individually and find out where they are, and what their lives are

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SO WHEN I THINK ABOUT MINISTRY, I WANT TO THINK ABOUT IT FROM A POSTURE OF SITTING CROSS-LEGGED ON THE FLOOR.



like, they not only feel valued by my listening but I can actually meet a real need that they have.

Thirdly, Jesus empowered her to go tell others about what he had told her about His living water. Now I believe that at that moment, that he “sent” her, she was a follower of Jesus, but she definitely had no training and no experience to tell others about him. However, the best person to tell others about the power of Jesus, is a person who has just seen His power drastically change their lives. I believe God can use any of His creation to bring glory to Him, and when a woman like this started talking about Jesus, I am sure people’s heads turned. And they had to know the power that Jesus truly had.

In my life, this story has played out in numerous ways. Over the last four years, I have gotten to know a Muslim woman that has become very close to our family. She is a single mom, and an Egyptian immigrant who struggles with her English and her understanding of American culture. She has had a hard life and when I began a relationship with her, I figured I would be the one serving her.

Yet, she has outdone me in generosity, self-sacrifice, and hospitality. She has treated me like a sister and has put my family before herself. She has attended church with us, we have prayed together, and cried and laughed together, and often we feel more alike than I would have ever thought. God has emptied me of myself, helped me get over my presuppositions, and given me His eyes to see her true value and worth. Instead of my goal being to “fix” her, my goal has been to show her how much God loves her and encourage her to journey with me in my daily life.

Humility is also important with other followers of Jesus. I started to get to know another mom at my boys’ school. She was the kind of woman who seemed like she had it together. Her perfection turned me off but our paths seemed to keep crossing. I could have tried to puff myself up and present myself at her level, but when it came down to it, I felt like just being real with her would help our relationship more. I shared with her some of my struggles with parenting and life and how God was helping me through. She immediately softened and opened up about her struggles.

Since that conversation, I have come to learn she is a faithful follower of Jesus. She has also been a huge support for my ministry at my boys’ school. We have invited their family to our church and have learned that her husband is not a Christian. She struggles with that, and I have been able to just listen and pray for her and help her feel heard and supported.

When we empty ourselves of our wants and just focus on obedience to God’s calling, we have a sense of what Paul talked about in 1 Corinthians 2. We have all been there, when we feel our total inadequacy with doing God’s work. But in our humility, people see and hear God, not us.

And only when we get to this point, can God truly be able to use us. When it becomes more about Him and less about me... I am willing to feel powerless and allow someone to serve me so they can feel needed and valued. I am willing to just sit and listen and not give advice so someone else feels understood. I am willing to empower someone and not just do it myself so they can feel the joy and fulfillment of obeying God’s calling.

So when I think about ministry, I want to think about it from a posture of sitting cross-legged on the floor. When we serve with others in this posture, we are ready to listen, ready to learn, and ready to value all the members of the team. We also won’t get in the way with our egos or our agendas and we can just let God do his perfect work through us.

Humility is hard but when we are aware of our posture, sitting face-to-face, walking along side others, it helps us to be more humble. This gives value and dignity to those that God has called us to live life with and will allow us deeper relationships than we have ever known and the opportunity to share about the true living water that only God can give.

Kate Ward works with Encompass World Partners, producing videos and assisting with church planting. She lives in Atlanta, Ga., with her husband, John, and their three boys. This is an edited version of her talk at Access2017, the national conference of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, which was held in Fremont, Ohio, July 25-27, 2017.

HONESTY IN RELATIONSHIPS

by Jennifer Avey

My husband, Scott, and I are new church planters; and our sending church sent us, along with one of our core families, to the Exponential Church Planting Conference last April. We went to a lot of different sessions and workshops; and in each and every one of the workshops that I attended, there was a question and answer time at the end. Someone would raise their hand and they'd share their particular context and ask the question.

Every time the speaker or presenter would be begin by asking them this question: "Are you affiliated with anyone? Do you have any partnering churches or organizations? Is there anyone walking alongside of you in this endeavor?"

And time after time after time the answer was, "No. We are on our own."

At that same conference we were invited by Nathan Bryant to a gathering, a collection of church planters, in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. We gathered in a home and we had a meal together. We shared with one another and we prayed over each other, and we were not on our own.

At a conference of thousands of people, many there were looking, yearning for that connection, that relationship, that access.

What we have is to be esteemed and held in high regard.

And the most important relationships, the ones that we value the most, aren't those the relationships that we put the most time and energy and care into?



We've been challenged this week to lean in to greater levels of intentionality and to check and maintain a posture of humility. And to lay as a foundation, honesty and candor.

And it doesn't really matter the relational container. It could be relationships here within the Fellowship. It could be in a local church community. Wherever you lead or serve, your small group or your family. Honesty and candor are pillars to health and growth and vitality.

I want to make a distinction between honesty and truth-telling. If we were to describe an honest person, we might say that they are someone who tells the truth; someone who can be trusted to relay information accurately or fairly; someone who has integrity in their dealings.

We might say of someone who speaks with great candor that they tell it like it is, they call things straight.

But I propose to you that the kind of honesty and candor that can bind us together in relationships takes it beyond mere truth-telling and calling it like it is. It's an honesty that offers something of ourselves, something of our own story, our own journey, our own experience, and offers it sincerely and authentically to something and someone else.

That an honest conversation, an honest engagement, is at its core a vulnerable one.

In those relationships where we have the most intentionality, aren't those the very relationships where we have

the most obstacles, the most challenges, disagreements, and opportunities for hard conversations?

And yet a foundation of honesty that offers something of ourselves can bind together relationships during times when they would otherwise be torn apart.

At our church plant in Brunswick, Md., we are attempting to cultivate a relational community where people can be known and know others, where there can be safety and authenticity.

One night at our gathering, I shared with a group of ladies. "I have to be very careful and vigilant not to allow depression to gain a foothold in my heart and mind," I said.

To be honest, there was an awkward silence. But afterwards one of the women came up to me. She shared something she said she had never been able to tell anyone else, and I was able to share with her the hope and victory that I have in the Person of Jesus Christ.

As we continued to engage, it became evident I needed to speak some truth in love. You see, depression has a way of creating blind spots, areas where lies and falsehoods can run wild; and I wanted to bring some of these things to her attention.

And I believe that because our relationship started and was founded on honesty and transparency, during that time we grew closer together.

She was even encouraged and empowered to reach out to someone else and share honestly, and now there's a

community of women encouraging each other and lifting each other up in Christ.

Now, sharing vulnerably, sharing something of ourselves, incurs great risk. Right? There's the risk of rejection, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, betrayal, wounding.

And those relationships that we care the most about, that we value the most, those are the ones that hurt the most. And nothing seems to cut as deep as a wound inflicted at the hands of a fellow brother and sister in Christ, a fellow co-laborer.

We love and serve a Lord and Savior who experienced betrayal. He experienced the ultimate rejection, the ultimate misunderstanding on our behalf so that we could be His witnesses, witnesses in relationships that have eternal impact.

So, as we walk alongside other brothers and sisters in Christ, even as we gather around our tables with friends and family, let us lean in to greater levels of honesty and candor, truly offering something of ourselves to those relationships that deeply matter.

Jennifer Avey is a church planter from Middletown, Md., and serves as the director of leadership development for the board of Women of Grace, USA. She is hopelessly in love with her husband, Scott Avey, and three children—Canon, Cadence, and Coda. This is an edited version of her talk at Access2017, the national conference of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, which was held in Fremont, Ohio, July 25-27, 2017.

TO CELEBRATE OR NOT?

MEMORY, OPPRESSION, AND LUTHER'S REFORMATION

by Jared S. Burkholder

Five hundred years ago this fall the German monk and rabble-rousing reformer, Martin Luther, published his famous 95 arguments or “theses” laid down against the church of Rome. Some would mark this as the beginning of the Reformation—an era of fragmentation that produced several new Protestant branches of Christianity and even a Catholic reformation.

This year has been filled with events marking the anniversary of Luther’s defiant career. Religious organizations and seminaries with roots in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions have been planning their commemorative events several years in advance. Websites have been created.¹ Scholarly organizations like the American Society of Church history have given particular attention to the anniversary² and Concordia Publishing House’s online gift shop³ is offering commemorative hats, shirts, and even a Martin Luther Lego minifigure! In short, it’s a really big deal.

The Reformations of the 16th-century not only changed the face of Christianity across the globe but also set the West on a trajectory that would usher in the modern world and arguably pave the way for the Enlightenment and modern democracy. But not all are apt to remember this turning point in history the same way. Roman Catholics are not prone to memorialize Luther. (For obvious reasons.) Neither are Jews. (Luther was quite anti-Semitic.)

Mennonites, Amish, and other heirs of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, who were severely punished and even executed with Luther’s approval, may also be reticent to mark this occasion. The so-called Anabaptists, dubbed “rebaptizers” by their enemies for performing adult baptisms, moved toward a theology of the church in which the community of believers stood apart from the political allegiances of this world—a new model in which the church was to remain independent of the state.

They also adopted believer’s baptism, which was a rejection of the standard Protestant and Catholic practice of infant baptism. Instead, they believed the rite should be performed after a believer was older and could make a personal profession.

The divide between the “Magisterial” Reformers (Luther, Calvin, et al.) and the “radical” reformers (Anabaptists) is an important distinction. The Magisterial reformers defied the Catholic church, but still subscribed to a political arrangement in which religious authorities worked together with civil magistrates to enforce an established state church, and this included the prosecution of dissenters. In addition to disagreeing with Luther and Calvin over theology and practice, radical reformers rejected this political model.

1 See lutheranreformation.org, reformation500.csl.edu, and elca500.org.

2 See churchhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Program_Draft1-2January2017.pdf

3 See cph.org/t-reformation.aspx

At a time when Americans are wrestling with how to remember the history of racism in America and what is worthy of commemoration, what should we make of the Reformation? What should those of us in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches do with Luther?

This question is perhaps even more poignant given the fact that in the 18th-century, the religious authorities—who were the religious and political heirs of the Magisterial Reformers—harassed and harangued the founders of our tradition in Germany. These founders were part of Pietism, which originated about 200 years after Luther nailed his statements to the church door.

Though not a branch of the original Reformation, the early Brethren were nevertheless motivated by a similar spirit to breathe new life into the existing churches. They were a loose-knit cluster of dissenters who wanted the freedom to pursue new ways of worship, and they sought a more experiential and personal communion with Christ. Organized outside the established church, their small groups or “conventicles” were a threat to the religious authority.

The Brethren also adopted believer’s baptism and made it a hallmark feature of their belief and practice—even though the authorities prosecuted it. This made them “new” Anabaptists. While none of the early Brethren faced execution like the original Anabaptists did, the Brethren still experienced abuse for their faith. They were imprisoned and exiled. Their families were broken up and their property confiscated. They were often wanderers and refugees finding haven in the few areas that would tolerate them.

So for members of the Brethren tradition, to celebrate or not to celebrate Luther’s Reformation is a complicated question. For some, questions about the relationship between the Brethren movement and the Reformation may not even seem relevant. All of this is “ancient history,” some might say.⁴

What is more, since the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches has increasingly gravitated toward American evangelicalism, many have come to identify with Luther and Calvin rather than with early Brethren leaders such as Alexander Mack. This might help explain why each spring at Grace College’s commencement service, it has become a tradition to sing Luther’s famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” The history of the “Grace Brethren” makes this understandable, but there is nevertheless some irony in this.

4 See After 500 years, Europe’s Reformation scars have all but healed, study finds, theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/31/reformation-protestant-catholic-europe-scars-healed-study

AT A TIME WHEN AMERICANS ARE WRESTLING WITH HOW TO REMEMBER THE HISTORY OF RACISM IN AMERICA AND WHAT IS WORTHY OF COMMEMORATION, WHAT SHOULD WE MAKE OF THE REFORMATION?

Regardless of these ironies or how Brethren think of themselves today, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and its leaders deserves to be remembered merely for its momentous historical significance and for the great changes that took place in its wake. And regardless of the Reformers' weakness and even abuses, their calls for institutional reform, their emphasis on bringing scripture to the masses, their new focus on the importance of personal faith and saving grace as well as their volumes of theological writings are worthy of celebration. In short, these Protestant traditions have made great contributions to Western society and global Christianity.

It is also important to remember and honor those who suffered, both in the 16th and the 18th centuries. This year's "Believers Church" conference⁵ (Mennonites and other Anabaptists) at Goshen College, for example, remembered both the "gifts and tensions of the Reformation legacy." Honoring multiple sides of the Reformation has even brought about reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptist groups⁶ in recent years. Honoring the victims of oppression can also prompt us to wrestle with a few of Christianity's big questions: How much should Christians identify with the political establishment? Should one version of Christian faith be legislated? What is the Christians' role in military service? Does tradition matter? Can we celebrate the past in a way that does not glorify oppression? In commemorating these events, it is essential to remember that the magisterial Reformers were only part of a larger era of upheaval and the efforts of Anabaptists and later, the Pietists and other dissenters, were equally important.

Anniversary celebrations are part and parcel of forming and perpetuating the historical narratives that give our lives meaning. What we choose to celebrate says a lot about our interpretation of the past and with what parts of it we want to identify. The question is not so much whether we should celebrate the Reformation or let it pass by without notice. Rather, how we remember the Reformation or any of history's turning points, is what matters most. Like any commemoration, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation should prod us to study the past, consider the many sides of historical events, and reflect on the narratives that continue to shape our spiritual identities.

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⁵ See The 18th Believer's Church Conference, goshen.edu/register/believers-church

⁶ See Lutherans reconcile with Mennonites 500 years after bloody persecution, dw.com/en/lutherans-reconcile-with-mennonites-500-years-after-bloody-persecution/a-5837683

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GOING WITH GOD

SHE LEFT THE AUDIENCE AND JUDGES IN AWE

Seventeen-year-old Tiffany Tabor thought she had her life figured out. The daughter of Mike (and Connie) Tabor, pastor of The Happy Church, a Grace Brethren church in Jackson, Ky., she planned to pursue a 13-month program to receive a license to be an ultrasound technician after graduating from homeschool next year.

“I was going to do something that would [lead to] a stable job,” she said.

“It wasn’t really my passion,” she noted. “If somebody would ask me what my dream would be, it would be either to work in animal rescue or to be a worship leader.”

Tabor grew up joining her family in leading worship at The Happy Church, playing guitar with her father and singing duets with her mother. As a child, she struggled with depression and turned to music – both singing and writing – as a solace.

This past July, Tiffany attended Momentum Youth Conference, sponsored by CE National at Indiana Wesleyan University. Tiffany had successfully auditioned for Momentum’s competition months before. Right before her youth conference debut, though, she decided to perform a different song – one she’d written herself. “There are so many people trying to make it in the music industry,” Tiffany said. “And my talent’s only mediocre. For a long time, I just thought that I wouldn’t make it anywhere [as a singer-songwriter] even if I did try.”

But the Momentum audience heard something very different. Tiffany performed her song, “Where Were You Then?” which re-

counts the depression and trauma of her childhood, and how God came alongside her in the midst of the pain.

She left the audience and judges in awe, capturing a well-deserved first place, which included a \$20,000 scholarship offered by Olivet College of Olivet, Mich.

“It turns out that my mom had prayed before Momentum,” Tiffany recalls. “She prayed that if God had a different plan for me, that He would show me at Momentum.”

Excited for the new possibility, Tabor knew that she still wouldn’t be able to attend Olivet without more financial support. That’s when their gospel choir director La’Rae M. Trice approached her with an offer – sing in the gospel choir, and Trice would make sure she had what she needed to go to their college.

Trice also gave her a once-in-a-lifetime offer: the opportunity to have her song recorded and produced in Nashville, Tenn., by the end of the year. Tiffany could also take songwriting classes, professional photos, and start building a fan base while in Nashville.

Basically, Tiffany was offered a fast track to becoming a professional singer-songwriter.

“I don’t really have a plan anymore. Because every time I make a plan, God’s like, ‘Nope, that’s not what I have for you. I’ve got something better.’ I’m just going with God on this.”

This story first appeared in the GraceConnect eNews, a weekly newsletter that shares what God is doing in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. Subscribe online at graceconnect.us/subscribe/.