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WORLD CHANGER

It was so simple, yet it was the highlight of the weekend.



I'd joined four of my long-time friends for a girls' get-away. That Saturday afternoon, we shared stories, laughed together, and shopped our way through the quaint destination we had chosen. But there was one moment that stands out in my mind.

Taking a break, one of my friends sat on a bench to call her mother, the caregiver for her ailing father in a city more than a hundred miles away. She learned he had taken a turn for the worse and her mother was alone, sitting at his side in the hospital.

As she concluded her conversation, my friend joined us, her eyes filled with tears. "He's not doing well," she said. "She's by herself. I wish I could be there with her."

It didn't take long for us to huddle around her with our arms around her. We prayed for her, for her dad in the hospital, and for her mom, who was carrying much of the burden by herself. We weren't in a grand cathedral or on a spectacular mountaintop, but on a modest street corner in small town America. In the moment, I felt the power of prayer and the importance of those relationships that allow us to come together before the throne of God.

It's a picture of the biblical relationships found within the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, which was one of the

top values identified by pastors and leaders last year during regional Focus Retreats.

Its significance is repeated again and again as I move among Grace Brethren gatherings.

"We are family."

"We need each other."

"Take pride in our tribe."

"I believe that you want the name of Jesus to be made famous," said Jeff Bogue, senior pastor of Grace Church in Akron, Ohio, speaking at Fellowship (2014 national conference). "I believe if we take all that God has given us, we love each other, and we share, then we can change the world."

This issue is about those world-changing relationships found in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. It is our hope that it will encourage you to seek out a pastor, leader, or parishioner in another church as a ministry teammate, prayer partner, or friend – all for the greater good of the Kingdom.

I'd encourage you to connect with others than through the platforms of *GraceConnect*, as well. You'll find opportunities to learn more about the people and churches of the FGBC through the weekly eNews, stories at graceconnect.us, and on social media sites such as facebook.com/graceconnectus, twitter.com/graceconnectus, or instagram.com/graceconnect.

Among those posts, you'll find opportunities to pray for someone else, like we did on that street corner. Later that evening, my friend talked to her mother again to learn that her dad had improved. In addition, a couple who had planned to visit the next day, showed up at the hospital that afternoon. They were an encouragement to her mom and an answer to prayer. For that moment, they changed the world for my friend's mother.



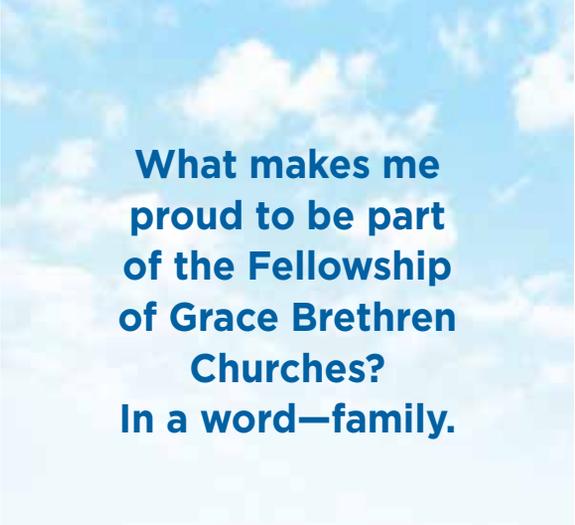
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FAMILY HABITS

by **Jeremy Wike**

God made us for family. God made us to be dependent upon others, to learn from others, to give to others, and to have an identity that is larger than ourselves. You don't always realize what you have until you see firsthand someone who's grasping for what you take for granted. The only thing worse than dealing with the troubles of family is not having one at all.





What makes me proud to be part of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches? In a word—family.

As I write this, I am in Beijing, China, with my wife, Tonya, preparing to meet our fourth child, Evelyn Joy. She is almost two years old, needs heart surgery, and has never known what a family is like. She's only ever been a number among other orphans, vying for her most basic needs to be met by a nanny.

This would be a cross to bear, were it not for the gratifying, redemptive privilege it is to introduce to a child what it's like to have a dad, mom, sister, and two brothers who think you are special.

In time, Evie will learn about belonging to a family. She'll learn that she is a vital contributor to the Wike family. She is loved, she is needed, she is wanted, and she makes our family unique.

Having watched this beautiful process of attachment occur in my two boys, who were also adopted from China in 2012, I eagerly anticipate the process which is sure to have twists and turns, disappointments and victories, and lots of love and laughter.

God made us for family. God made us to be dependent upon others, to learn from others, to give to others, and to have an identity that is larger than ourselves. You don't always realize what you have until you see firsthand someone who's grasping for what you take for granted. The only thing worse than dealing with the troubles of family is not having one at all.

The FGBC Family

I really do not like trying to describe my "denomination" to inquirers. Growing up, my answer was "kind of like a baptism, but three times better!" That didn't help anyone understand what a "Grace Brethren" was.

What makes me proud to be part of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC)? In a word—family. The only thing worse than dealing with the troubles of family is not having one at all.

I began attending the Grace Brethren Church in Wooster, Ohio, when I was in first grade. I met my best friend there. Dave Holmes is still my best friend; and he's the senior pastor of the Centerville, Ohio, Grace Brethren Church. We chat often about our wives and kids, our churches, and go to conferences together.

He's my family.

I went to Grace College eager to learn all theological contours—it was like drinking from a firehose. I found a comrade in Dr. Mark Soto, who answered more of my annoying questions than I care to

admit. He also took me with him to the Central African Republic as he taught a class at the Bible school, then in Bata. That was a truly life-changing trip for me. He and I still converse about life and theology.

He's my family.

I called Bob Fetterhoff in a panic the day I was asked to do my first funeral. For 45 minutes, he walked me through the details surrounding a funeral service. He helped turn my anxiety into confidence. He's the same Bob who baptized me as an 11-year old kid.

He's my family.

I was about to die of hopelessness in ministry when I was honest with Jim Brown at a ministerial meeting. I was immature. I was young. I was ready to quit. I was a #2 on staff of a church without a #1. I felt rejected. I must have missed my calling in ministry, because it sure wasn't to lead a church through crisis and transition!

Jim invited me to a staff meeting at Grace Community Church in Goshen, Ind., the following week. For about an hour, his staff celebrated a great Sunday of worship. I listened. I wasn't feeling any better as I subconsciously juxtaposed my situation with the great things happening just two days before at the Goshen church. This wasn't therapy at all.

Then these six guys turned to me and listened. They asked questions, commiserated, and prayed for me for the next hour. They believed in me and infused confidence and hope in me. They saw what I didn't.

These guys are family.

These men are all part of my story. My family. There are a lot of other people who have invested in me, prayed for me, and otherwise "spur[red me] on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

What I love about our FGBC family is that I've since had the opportunity to invest in others who are where I once was. It hasn't always been easy, but every member of a



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**One of the biggest habits
I've tried to develop is
to be an encourager of
others, regardless of
whether they do things
the way I do.**

family has something to gain and something to contribute to the whole and to each individual member. The only thing worse than dealing with the troubles of family is not having one at all.

No one denies that it takes work to put yourself in a position to be a contributor and a beneficiary. Below are two simple habits that I believe help the FGBC family be a God-honoring, thriving group of churches and individuals.

Habit #1: Stretch yourself relationally

For some it's easy to learn a stranger's life story in an elevator. (My wife, Tonya, has this gift.) Others aren't wired that way. Either way, there's a vast array of wisdom and enrichment to be gained from reaching out to a new face. I make it my habit to find at least one unfamiliar person to make a relational connection with when I attend any gathering of Grace Brethren people. I engage in conversations with someone I either know by name or association, but I don't know personally.

I've never had anyone ignore me or tell me that I'm too insignificant for their time and attention. In fact, quite the opposite. After a few years, it is amazing how many more people you know.

These new connections never replace the existing friendships or traditions with longtime friends, but they fuel my appreciation of the family and help me to learn and grow. This brings us to the second habit.

Habit #2: Stretch yourself methodologically

I have strong opinions.

There's a fine line between confidence and pride and I'm not always on the right side of the line. So there's one right way to do ministry, right?

There's much to learn from others who have different spiritual gifts, abilities, cultural contexts, and experiences shaping their outlook and perspective. One of the biggest habits I've tried to develop is to be an encourager of others, regardless of whether they do things the way I do. Is uniformity really what we want?

When I learn from others who are approaching ministry differently, it forces me to think deeper, study harder, and pray more intensely. It helps me be as effective as I can be

as a leader and shepherd. I'm sure many people may disagree with me on ministry philosophy or theological convictions, but I typically hear brothers and sisters in the trenches offering to help, not hurt me. We are on the same team, right?

I've had countless cups of coffee or meals with other pastors so I can learn new ideas about an aspect of ministry. My goal is to find transferable principles or approaches that I can adopt and adapt.

I'm never disappointed. The only thing disappointing is that I cannot reciprocate with the wisdom I take away from such encounters. I'm usually the one initiating the meeting. The other pastor usually doesn't gain much from time with me. But I know I'm better off because our time.

Families don't have to posture with each other to give off the appearance of being perfect. Your ministry is a well-oiled machine for all of one week or less before something needs lubricated or repaired. In our Grace Brethren family, we each ought to utilize the vast array of resources and experience represented. We are foolish or prideful if we do not.

Welcome to the Family!

My daughter will slowly adapt and learn to trust that her new mom and dad love her unconditionally. She'll realize that she has an important place in the Wike family. But she will make the choice as to whether she'll accept her seat at our table emotionally and physically. There are no guarantees of a happy ending. I know that if her mom, dad, big sister, and two big brothers have anything to say about it, she'll have quite the persuasive group celebrating her journey every step—even the hard ones—along the way.

The same is true for each of us. We can become mired in the past, believe we are "the only one" (whatever that means), or just not care enough to make the family a priority. In other words, we can take the family for granted.

The only thing worse than dealing with the troubles of family is not having one at all. Be the kind of family member you wish everyone else already were. In time, others are sure to follow.

Editor's Note: Jeremy Wike is pastor of Community of Hope Grace Brethren Church in Columbia City, Ind.

INTENTIONAL PARTNERING



Pastors from three churches in the Northern Atlantic Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches gather regularly to collaborate on sermons and other ministries. Left to right are Tim Hodge, Brad Gromis, Cory Murphy, Scott Feather, and Dustin Godshall. (Inset, Gromis, Jon Damon, Hodge)

“I love preaching and that was the driving force behind the change. But, I knew I needed to network and connect with other pastors in my area as I transitioned to the role of being a solo pastor.”



When Dustin Godshall became pastor of the Grace Brethren Church in York, Pa., he knew he'd miss the camaraderie of being part of a larger church. While on staff at Grace Church in Powell, Ohio (Rick Nuzum, lead pastor), he'd enjoyed the collaboration found among multiple staff pastors who served the congregation of more than 800. Now he was leading a congregation of about 100 people.

“I love preaching and that was the driving force behind the change,” he says of his decision to move to York. “But, I knew I needed to network and connect with other pastors in my area as I transitioned to the role of being a solo pastor.”

At his first meeting with the ministerium network of the Northern Atlantic Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches, he reconnected with several college friends – all pastors at churches in eastern Pennsylvania, who, he discovered, were collaborating as they prepared their individual sermons.

So when he was invited to join them in January, he jumped at the opportunity.

“I was thrilled to find guys who think like me and are passionate about putting energy and creativity into messages,” he said. “It was also great to find guys with more experience than I have both as preachers and as pastors.”

He joined with the clergy at Grace Family Church in New Holland, Pa., and Gateway Grace Community Church in Parkesburg, Pa., who have been collaborating since 2012.

Tim Hodge, pastor at New Holland, was the first to explore the possibility of cooperating with churches that were geographically close to him. “It just made sense that our creativity would increase and our respective workloads would potentially ease if churches would share more with each other,” he noted. “Many churches have spent much time and effort developing ideas and resources, and from what I see, there is little reason not to share and much blessing when we do.”

He met Mike Silliman and Jon Damon for lunch. They were both on staff at Gateway Grace, just 17 miles to the south of Hodge's church. “That lunch meeting started a dialogue that quickly shifted into practical partnering,” Hodge said.

Hodge joined the Gateway Grace staff in Parkesburg for their weekly meetings. “We were not sure exactly where this cooperative venture would lead,” he admitted, “whether it would morph into a formal multi-campus approach, a merger, or informal partnering.” But over the last three years, they have settled into an intentional informal partnership where the men work together, but each local church remains distinct.

The group continues to meet at the Parkesburg church. Scott Feather

joined when he was called as lead pastor at Gateway Grace after Silliman moved to Goshen, Ind. (to join Pastor Jim Brown in a staff position at Grace Community Church). Both Gateway and Grace Family Church have added staff: Cory Murphy and Brad Gromis, respectively, who participate in the conversations. Godshall joins in via a video call from nearly 50 miles away.

The group meets annually to develop a yearlong schedule of themes, and then works through the list at each weekly meeting. “We roughed out our preaching outline for the year, then started breaking each topic into four- to eight-week series,” said Godshall. Each week they look at the topics ahead and brainstorm illustrations, sermon texts, potential outlines, video support, and graphics. Then they each go back to their respective churches to prepare their own sermons.

“Do all the sermons sound the same?” noted Feather, who likened the practice to the Gospels: “telling the same story from different perspectives.”

“Preaching is not a ‘cookie cutter’ kind of thing. We each bring our own life experience to the sermon and are each working with different ‘soil’ in our congregations and communities,” he said.

While the themes might be the same from week-to-week, they also have the understanding that a church is free to go its own direction if a certain topic doesn’t meet the needs of the congregation. For example, earlier this year, Gateway spent three weeks on a “vision” series, while Family Grace went a different direction. But, Godshall said, “It is hard to go back to doing everything on your own when you get used to working with a team of guys.”

The partnership has been beneficial.

“I love working with other like-minded people who also value team,” said Hodge. “I have felt affirmed in my ministry efforts, encouraged during hard times, and have seen the fruit in the lives of people in different locations,” he added. “It has been a tremendous blessing for me and for the church that I serve.”



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“Ministry is often done alone,” Feather noted. “I need these men in my life. They motivate me, encourage me, challenge me, refine my thinking, and speaking. They make me not only a better preacher, but a better man.”

The leadership at the York church was the first to encourage Godshall to seek such relationships. “Our elders saw the importance of working together and benefiting from this team work,” he said. “Joining a team like this will help you think outside of the box and keeping you from falling into the rut of a typical Sunday morning schedule,” he added. “Being part of a family is a good thing.”

The men have found little that is negative about their partnership and encourage other pastors to consider such alliances.

“I believe that God is honored when we are willing to lay aside our personal pride and work together in partnership with others,” noted Hodge. “Partnership does not have to involve merging or even full leadership structure compliance. There is room for diversity and differences in ministry methodology and specifics.”

The group has found that the relationships have extended beyond the preaching team. They’ve been able to fill in for one another when one pastor needs to be out of the pulpit and have joined churches for other ministries, such as Fight Club, the men’s discipleship program.

In 2014, the New Holland church hosted the Gateway staff for a special Christmas meal, while the Gateway staff provided hors d’oeuvres and organized entertainment for the holiday party for the Grace Family Church staff.

“I think it was a wonderful success and reinforced the message that we are not ministering in isolation. We are working together, and helping each other out, as we seek to honor God and be more and more effective in ministry,” noted Hodge.

It’s a model that Hodge believes is biblical, believing that there is clear indication in Paul’s letters that the early churches in various regions knew of each other, cared for each other, and deliberately and intentionally cooperated together. “There was an awareness of the fact that believers were on mission together, and needing to work in partnership for the cause of the Gospel,” he stressed, noting that today’s trend toward churches and ministries working alone would likely have been considered by the early church as abnormal or unhealthy.

He also believes that taking steps to partner with Gateway has been one of the best things he has done in ministry. “Without this partnership, I doubt that the local church I serve would be as healthy and exciting as it is today,” he said. “I believe God has been greatly honored by our willingness to intentionally partner together.”

WORKING TOGETHER

Interested in developing a collaborative relationship with other pastors in your region? Here are a few tips from the group in eastern Pennsylvania:

- If you operate well in a team environment, this is a great experience to explore. If you are a “do it my way” person, it probably will be too great a challenge and will struggle.
- Face-to-face meetings are preferable. Adding someone via video conferencing software such as Face Time or Skype, is doable, but can be distracting.
- Create some healthy, realistic communication goals.
- Don’t be afraid to say, “Wow, that is a bad idea.” To be able to say, “I love you, but that is not a good idea,” is priceless.
- Establish a good way to share files, such as creating a common Dropbox or other online folder.
- Know what resources are available from other churches. Many are willing to share graphics, videos, and other resources from a sermon series.
- Find ways to spend some time together outside of the sermon planning meetings. Sharing meals, car-pooling for ministry trips, and attending conferences together can further enrich and deepen the partnering adventure.

SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

by Christy Hill

Spiritual friendship provides an important context for relating to God in ever-maturing ways, which gives glory to Him by fulfilling His original purpose for humankind's creation. It can be defined as a close relationship between two Christians with the purpose of pursuing Christ as they pursue each other.

"Ordinary friendships are generally characterized by intimacy, trust, and mutual enjoyment of one another," said Mindy Caliguire. "Spiritual friends share those qualities, of course, but are also characterized by another element: spiritual friends actively help us pay attention to God."¹

Unlike family relationships, spiritual friendship provides a unique perspective on dynamics of intimacy because it is a mutual relationship, where love bridges power differentials and both parties maintain the relationship by choice. Therefore, friendship love specializes in mirroring the spiritual concept of mutuality in the areas of trust and intimacy, choice, and safety.

Contribution to Spiritual Formation

In friendship love, one learns the powerful lesson of mutual trust and intimacy forged through self-disclosure.

"Friendship, a reciprocal and mutual love, recognizes this truth about nature: that we need not only to give ourselves in love but also to receive love in return," wrote Gilbert Meilaender.² While charitable love gives with no expectation of return, it also does not require mutual self-disclosure. Spiritual friendship is predicated upon mutual intimacy.

A friend is called the guardian of love or, as some prefer, the guardian of the soul itself. Why? Because it is proper for my friend to be the guardian of mutual love or of my very soul, that he may in loyal silence protect all the secrets of my spirit and may bear and endure according to his ability anything wicked he sees in my soul. For the friend will rejoice with my soul rejoicing, grieve with it grieving, and feel that everything that belongs to a friend belongs to himself.³

Through the special revelation of Scripture, we see that God is a self-disclosing God, inviting humans into an intimate relationship.⁴ The means of becoming self-disclosing back is developed through spiritual friendship.

While there are other sources of self-knowledge, "friendship does seem to have features that make it a privileged source of self-knowledge and even, perhaps necessary for adequate self-knowledge," wrote Neera Badhwar.⁵

For spiritual growth, the investment of oneself in spiritual friendship promotes not only the goal of unity in the body of Christ, but also maturity in the bond of human-divine love. For it is through self-knowledge that we learn to disclose our true selves to God and understand the important contrast of who He is to who we are.

As we get in touch with our true selves, especially our weakness, the reality and supremacy of Christ become more than head knowledge. We are desperate for Christ's power to be perfected in us through the experience and disclosures of our human finiteness and weakness.⁶

Knowledge of self and disclosure of who we are, which grows in spiritual friendships, become important tools that God uses in spiritually forming us and conforming us to the image of His Son.

The second area that spiritual friendship promotes is that of choice.

Friendship, since it is not a legalized institution, requires only the formality of mutual choice.⁷ The ontology of spiritual friendship deems that it cannot be forced onto anybody—two interested and willing parties must pursue it.

The idea of mutual, ongoing volition is the only guarantee of deep friendship. The importance of choice in one's relational dynamic with God is foundational to the sanctification process.

Relationships, if they are valid and authentic ones, are characterized by a sense of partnership and mutuality. So it is also in the Divine-human relationship. In terms of Christian Spirituality, mutuality means that the grace of God, received through faith in Jesus Christ, must be received and acted upon by the human will.⁸

While God's love is freely given to all people (John 3:16), his friendship love is offered to those who attach themselves to Jesus and are called his disciples.⁹

The depth of friendship is predicated upon choice. The lesser interested party determines the level of intimacy experienced by both. God's desire for friendship with His people is "at the mercy" of individual choice to respond back to Him. When looked at this way, we see that intimacy with God is limited when humans desire to remain hidden.

Mutual choice in friendship love provides a window to an important spiritual reality, the power of choosing to love and be loved. Each human has a choice to make in terms of how close they will let God into their lives. Friendship love models the reality of this dance.

The last area that spiritual friendship models is safety.

Safety allows for authenticity and a free exchange between the two parties. As John says, "Perfect love drives out fear."¹⁰

The experience of spiritual friendship allows earthly realities to mirror heavenly realities that are desired by God and for which humans were originally made.

The work of the cross is highlighted in this friendship paradigm. God as the superior has condescended toward the inferior, making a way for love to flow between the two parties. What separated hu-



mankind from God, rebellion from God's rule and unrighteousness, is now no longer a barrier. By being in Christ, an individual now has Christ's righteousness imputed to his or her account.¹¹

The gap of righteous inequality has been bridged by the initiating work of Christ on the cross and safety has been established. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."¹² The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus give hope that God truly desires intimate friendship.

"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."¹³ Safety provides a new motivation behind compliance. Fear of punishment is exchanged for the joy of intimate relationship. Obedience is given not out of begrudging duty, but out of love for the one who has set us free.

Spiritual friendship on the human level develops mental, emotional, and social paradigms for the dynamics that God enlists in service to greater ends in friendship with Himself, the true nature of progressive sanctification.

Spiritual growth is what spiritual leaders desire to promote. In order to understand and encourage spiritual growth, spiritual friendship is seen as a spiritual discipline that promotes and enhances one's relationship with God. Deep, intimate spiritual friendships are an important investment of time and energy, for they can be working models through which God discloses Himself to His people.

Editor's Note: Christy Hill, Ph.D., is professor of Spiritual Formation and Women's Ministries at Grace Theological Seminary.

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We Care! Pastors carry a heavy burden, so we pray, plan and work to do whatever we can to come alongside the pastors of our Fellowship. We recognize the importance of a well-trained and spiritually healthy pastor. We desire that they are able to effectively shepherd those under their care.

We work to build greater connection, encourage our pastors to keep growing, remind them to take a break, and provide help when a pastor is in need.

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RELATIONSHIPS AND SHARED MINISTRY

by Tom Julien

“I have never felt a deeper relationship with my brothers in Christ than since we have been serving together on the same ministry team.”

This is something not only heard, but observed in the lives of those committed to sharing ministries in the church. As believers we are all members of one body. The apostle Paul says that from Christ the head, “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:16).” Earlier in the same passage we learn that the members of the body do their work when they are equipped for ministry.

Today the term “equip” has a variety of meanings, but originally it meant to connect. Churches that have transformed their elected committees into functioning ministry teams, in which every member has a responsibility to fulfill, have made an encouraging discovery. They have learned that connecting people to ministries also connects them to each other in relationships that are deeply fulfilling.

During the past few years a number of churches in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches have become a part of an Equipping Network. This is an informal grouping of churches in which the leaders, both pastors and lay leaders, measure their effectiveness not only by how well they do ministry, but also by how well they involve others in ministry.

Though equipping occurs in one way or another in every church, the challenge of every church is to make it a part of the church’s DNA. An Equipping Church is one in which there is an intentional commitment to equipping, the designation of someone to serve as an equipping coordinator, and an effort to make equipping an expression of the church’s culture.

Here are some observations that have grown out of the experience of those who are seeking to infuse such a culture into their churches.

Intercession. Dependent prayer is the indispensable element for being an equipping church—not just through lip service or routine prayers at the beginning of meetings,

but prayers of genuine faith. Ministry is not what we do for the Lord, but what He chooses to do through us. Praying in faith means total dependence on the Lord of the church as the One from whom and into whom the church grows. Infusing an equipping culture requires the mobilization of people to intercede regularly for the involvement of the church’s members in ministry, for members to identify their giftedness, and for the church’s ministries.

Identification. Every church must be able to identify its ministry needs. For many churches, this is difficult because paid staff members fulfill most ministries. When ministry needs are identified, equipping churches are able to focus on the development of open-ended ministry teams focusing on these needs. These ministry teams usually replace the committees and commissions that are elected on a yearly basis. Equipping churches develop ways of identifying those the Lord has sent them in order to involve them in ministries.

Involvement. An Equipping Church believes that every member is gifted for ministry. Therefore an Equipping Church will be focused on involving every member into a specific ministry. This will enable the members to discover their gifts, and will create a thirst for further training. Traditionally we have been led to believe that people should first be trained, and then allowed to become involved in ministry. However, the best training is in ministry rather than for ministry.

Instruction. It has been mentioned that involvement in ministry creates a thirst for further training. Training that is disassociated with ministry can easily become theory. In addition to personal mentoring and coaching provided by the ministry teams, specialized training should be offered. This training should be related to felt needs and should be holistic, targeting both the head, heart, and hands. Though creating a Bible training school within the church can be an effective aspect of training, this kind of formal training is only one of many training tools for equipping.

Inspiration. The success or failure of infusing an equipping culture is directly related to the ability of the



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church to give value to those in ministry through positive affirmation. Nothing is more motivational than a spontaneous word of sincere appreciation for ministry well done. Problems have to be dealt with, but can usually be handled in a way that will not diminish the person's sense of value. Criticism should always be sandwiched between statements emphasizing appreciation on the one hand, and challenges to the potential of the person on the other. In addition to spontaneous affirmation, monthly equipping gatherings that foster a sense of teamwork for all who are involved in ministry are very effective for showing appreciation to those involved in ministry.

An Equipping Church values people above programs.

An Equipping Church values people's potential above their position.

An Equipping Church values people's purpose above policy and process.

Becoming an equipping church is a journey, rather than a destination. But it is a journey well worth taking, for it can transform ministry consumers into ministry co-workers. An Equipping Church encourages all members to rise to their full potential for Christ.

Editor's Note: Tom Julien is the former executive director of Grace Brethren International Missions (Encompass World Partners). He now serves as equipping pastor at the Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church, and continues to be a leader in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

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FLINCH CONFERENCE

REMINDERS OF RISK AT FLINCH CONFERENCE

We've left family and friends to pioneer new ministries, sacrificed financially to start new works, and adapted to new cultures. Yet sometimes we forget that risk is a never-ending experience.

Risk is not an unfamiliar place for many in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. Our network of congregations has pioneered ministries in remote (and some not-so-remote) locations around the globe, traveled treacherous roads to plant churches in North America, and dove in head-first to help people experience the love of Jesus Christ and to come to know Him as Lord and Savior.

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This year's national FGBC gathering, Flinch Conference, is designed as a much-needed gut check in the risk department.

The conference will be held July 23-26 at the Newark International Airport Marriott just outside of New York City.

Among the keynote speakers is Alan Hirsch, a South African-born missiologist, author, and a leader in the missional church movement. His recent book, *Faith of Leap*, speaks directly to the theme of Flinch Conference.

A variety of workshops on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday will address subjects such as church planting, leadership development, communications, social issues, and other topics.

On Saturday, the conference will head for New York City on a variety of "Riskursions" that will challenge and encourage participants. Among the destinations are the Bowery Mission, Ground Zero, Harlem, and other locations where God is working in areas of the city that one might deem difficult.

To register for Flinch, see flinchconference.com/register.

For housing options, see flinchconference.com/location/.