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THE JOURNEY OF DISCIPLESHIP

I've learned that being like Jesus takes on many different forms. Being a disciple is more than reading a book, unless it's the Bible, of course. And it helps to have someone on your journey with you - to encourage you, to make you think, and to challenge your decisions.



“Be Like Jesus”

In my mind, that was the title of the book, but I'm not sure. Whatever it was, I quickly snatched the hardcover volume off the bookstore shelf. Discipleship was a buzz word in those post-college days, and this book seemed to promise a quick way to really be a disciple of Jesus. After all, that's what the Christian life is all about, right?

The book sat on my desk for weeks, then months. I tried to read it, but I found it dry and dull. Being a disciple seemed to be beyond my reach. Was that what discipleship was about?

With age, I've learned that being like Jesus takes on many different forms. Being a disciple is more than reading a book, unless it's the Bible, of course. And it helps to have someone on your journey with you - to encourage you, to make you think, and to challenge your decisions.

I love seeing how discipleship takes place in our network of congregations. It may not be called that, but it is happening. The number of senior pastors who have taken young leaders

under their wings is inspiring - and hopeful for the future of our Fellowship. The Women's Leadership Studies classes, a ministry of Women of Grace USA in partnership with Grace Theological Seminary, is stimulating women around the nation to step up and guide others in the faith. Discipleship is happening in youth groups, women's and men's ministries, children's activities, and Christian homes, just to name a few.

This issue is devoted to some of those discipleship opportunities. I trust as you read the words of Tom Julien, Melissa Spoelstra, and Jeremy Wike, you'll be motivated to try it yourself or to encourage others to step into discipleship relationships, whether at church, in ministry, or at home.

Part of the joy of being a disciple of Jesus is joining with others in ministry and prayer. That's why I like Philippians 1:3-6 as a reminder to pray for others. In the Message, it describes what we at GraceConnect envision for the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches - partners in the gospel, with cues that trigger us to joyfully pray for one another. I love the reminder "that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears."

At GraceConnect, we want to encourage joyful prayer and keeping at the work to which God has called our Fellowship. Because of that, we are a resource for networking, ministry ideas, and information in a community that nurtures prayer, encouragement, and inspiration.

We can't do this partnership ministry without your financial support. In this issue, you'll find an envelope tucked between the pages. I'd ask that you use it to consider how your gift might allow GraceConnect to continue to be a resource and a community in our network of congregations, or in the words of our mission statement, build bridges of communication.



Liz Cutler Gates, lcutler@bmbbooks.com, is the editor of Grace Connect. Since 2010, she has served as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She and her husband, Doug, live in Warsaw, Ind.

YOUR KIDS ARE NOT YOUR REPORT CARD

by Melissa Spoelstra

A children's ministry leader motioned for me to come to the back during the church service one Sunday. She asked if I knew the parents of a certain child and wanted me to help her locate them. Their daughter had been scratched in the face by another three-year-old and she needed to inform them. She didn't know the details or which child was the scratcher. When we arrived at the classroom, I discovered that it had been my daughter that had done the scratching. After profusely apologizing to the couple, I packed up my kids and scooted home as quickly as possible.

If I was getting a mom grade that day, it felt like an "F."

Another time I sat in a school assembly where they awarded the citizen of the year to only one third-grader in the entire school. When my son's name was announced, I beamed. Arriving home after being congratulated many times over, I felt like an "A" parent. (At least until one of the twins threw a tantrum.)

It's easy to fall into the trap of seeing our kids as our grade cards. God calls us to train them, not to exasperate them, and to lovingly discipline them. So, when they obey that must mean we are succeeding and when they disobey we've missed the mark. Right?

IT'S EASY TO FALL INTO THE TRAP OF SEEING OUR KIDS AS OUR GRADE CARDS. WHEN THEY OBEY THAT MUST MEAN WE ARE SUCCEEDING AND WHEN THEY DISOBEY WE'VE MISSED THE MARK. RIGHT? WRONG.



Wrong. God modeled perfect parenting. He walked in the garden in close relationship with Adam and Eve. He clearly laid out instructions about which tree was off limits. His kids still disobeyed even when God loved them perfectly. He continues to discipline, instruct, and walk with His children. However, He doesn't grade Himself with our successes and failures.

When we begin to use the behavior of our children as our measure as a parent we will find:

- We pass judgment on others when their children struggle rather than encouraging and praying for them.
- We yo-yo between pride when our children are compliant and shame in times of rebellion.
- We envy the social media posts of academic, athletic, and other achievements of our friend's kids.

What does God expect from us in regards to the training of our children?

We want them to develop character qualities like obedience, self-control, courage, and kindness. God calls us to train them. Proverbs 22:6 (ESV) says, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it."

God calls us as parents to do all that we can to teach our children about Him so that He can work in their lives. Their character must flow out of a heart dependent on Jesus.

Rather than focus on our grade in the moment, we need to seek to be faithful to lead our kids to know and love God over the long haul. Some of the best times to do this come during our children's bad behavior. We can teach them about God's discipline, His grace, and His Gospel through the ups and downs of their choices.

Some of the best ways of training we can give them are:

- Modeling what we want them to become. (If we want them to read the Bible and pray, they should see us doing it.)
- Clearly communicating expectations and consequences. (Getting down on eye level and using few words so they don't get confused.)
- Consistently enforcing consequences. (Even when it feels like it isn't working in the moment, I've seen it work over a decade with patient consistency.)
- Admitting our own failures and asking their forgiveness. (Even though we are their God-given authority, we are also sinners who don't always get it right.)
- Making God our parenting audience of One so we care more about what He thinks about our kids behavior than the watching world.

So, when I'm concerned about a disrespectful tone or a bad test score, I'm not going to embrace a parenting



"F" for the day. Instead, I'll pray for perspective and persistence to keep loving and parenting with complete dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide me through. If I'm not modeling, communicating, consistent, or humble, then I need to repent and ask God for help in making a change. Once I rest that I am obeying God to love and discipline my child, I'll leave the results up to Him. Thankfully He calls me to be faithful to Him, not to produce perfect children. While we are instructed to train them and lead them to Jesus, our kids are not our report card.

Editor's Note: A popular women's conference speaker and Bible teacher, Melissa Spoelstra is the author of Jeremiah: Daring to Hope in an Unstable World (Abingdon Press, 2014) and Joseph: The Journey to Forgiveness (Abingdon Press, 2016). Her husband, Sean, is pastor of Encounter Church, a Grace Brethren congregation in Dublin, Ohio, where they live with their four children.

CONSISTENCY IN CONDUCT

by Jeremy Wike

All of us want to see our church families filled with fully devoted followers of Jesus. The question is not our intent, but rather our execution. What's the secret sauce for discipleship?



WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH THE DISPARITY BETWEEN THOSE ENGAGED IN VIBRANT DISCIPLESHIP—BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS IN ACTION, WORD, AND THOUGHT—AND THOSE MERELY PROFESSING TO BE CHRISTIANS?



“Practice makes perfect,” they used to say. I thought that too until I discovered something during my basketball playing days at Grace College. One day in practice I noticed something about my shooting form that sent chills up my spine: my follow-through was putting a slight spin on the ball. Muscle memory is everything under pressure, so my incorrect form had not produced “perfection” after much practice, but rather the opposite.

Now we say, “Perfect practice makes perfect.” I agree completely. If only I had asked someone to take a closer look at my shooting form. I knew the right information (B.E.E.F.—balance, elbow, eyes, follow through); I didn’t have input from someone else to point out what I didn’t realize until it was too late.

The Discipleship Disparity

This might also be why we are disappointed that those claiming the name of Jesus don’t look as much like Him as we might hope. (I hear the cautions of the wise sages screaming that my expectations are too high and that there is much going on in the heart that we don’t see. I’m not disputing this, but I don’t think Jesus had the low standards we’re accustomed to adopting today.) What are we to do with the disparity between those engaged in vibrant discipleship—becoming more like Jesus in action, word, and thought—and those merely professing to be Christians?

All of us want to see our church families filled with fully devoted followers of Jesus. The question is not our intent, but rather our execution. What’s the secret sauce for discipleship?

In case you haven’t searched Amazon for discipleship material, I’ll tell you that we don’t lack biblical resource materials—information. What we are lacking is a strategy that provides our people with imitation.

I realized this recently in a profound way. I thought about the amount of time “just doing life” with people I don’t spend. People don’t satisfactorily catch the subtleties of

obedience to Jesus in the sterile laboratory of my sermons, Bible studies, or other “controlled” settings.

Learning New Rhythms

How can I better help people open their eyes to hurting people around them? I probably need to take them with me and watch how I imperfectly speak to hurting people. How do I better help people interact with their kids? (Gulp.) I have to show them how I interact with my kids. Even when I’m “hangry” (it’s real, I promise). How do I help people struggling in their marriages? (Gulp.) I have to show them how I interact with my wife. And not just when we’ve got our “game faces” on (“Hey kids, daddy will give you dessert if you don’t kill each other when our guests are here.”), but when we are also at our weakest.

Too many people I shepherd need to see what this life of following Jesus looks like in me. I believe more than ever that those with God’s Spirit in them are often ignorant more often than rebellious. They may not even have a vocabulary or the wherewithal to tell someone they are struggling to put Scripture into practice. But I have boundaries to maintain. Why can’t I continue to institutionalize discipleship? I could, but then I recently read a text that grabbed me by the jugular. I saw something I’d never seen before.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 (NIV): “I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

Paul is like a father to the church at Corinth. And he invites the Corinthians to “imitate” his life. And in his absence, Timothy was a viable substitute because what he does, Paul does. How he talks, Paul talks. How he thinks,

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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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OUR CHURCHES ARE FILLED WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE CRAVING A PERSON WHOSE LIFE LOOKS LIKE JESUS. WHERE WILL THEY FIND IT IF WE DON'T SHOW THEM?



Paul thinks. Perhaps Paul didn't intend for this to be descriptive of his ministry strategy, but rather prescriptive for us today (because it works)!

But this requires a re-orientation of how we view ourselves in our churches. We aren't professionals who offer services for consumers. We are role models to be imitated. Would this bridge the gap between the number of professing followers of Jesus and the number of fully devoted disciples of Jesus?

It's the Small Things

I recently took my eight-year-old daughter to a funeral visitation. It was risky. But I want her to develop a heart for hurting people. The lady from our church who had just lost her dad grabbed my daughter by the hand and took her to see a display of her dad's John Deere toys. She relished the therapeutic balm of my daughter's presence in her time of need. My daughter was just taking it all in. I can tell my daughter all the time that caring for hurting people is important, but she got to feel what it's like that night.

Our churches are filled with people who are craving a person whose life looks like Jesus. Where will they find it if we don't show them?

It's the Raw Things

There are a lot of skeletons in the closets of people sitting in our auditoriums each week. People are resistant to be open about being abused as a child, dealing with mental illness, sexual struggles, marital tensions, financial chaos, parental stress, sexual identity confusion, etc. Who knew, right?

How likely is it for them to fully live on mission for Jesus if these are the sorts of challenges plaguing them daily? And what do they too often see from me?

I'm good at putting my best foot forward when I know people are watching. And so are these struggling people. What's it going to take to move them toward healing and wholeness? Somehow I hear Paul's words again. Not because I'm perfect, but because I'm a living example of

one who aspires to live like Jesus. If I don't show these people, who will?

Is it a gamble to lead with a "limp"? We risk having people who know what the Bible says without understanding the way it ought to change their lives. Know anyone like this?

It's the Main Thing

"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice" (Philippians 4:9). This is the Apostle Paul again. Most of our churches have great theological and practical content (aka information). But do the people we shepherd "see" an example to follow up close? Is the information you teach colored by illustrations of your imperfect life?

Of course, you can't live up close to everyone in the church. Jesus only had twelve disciples. Moreover, the disciples of Jesus didn't change the world because of the teaching they received from Jesus (much of the time they didn't understand anyway!). They changed the world because Jesus lived life next to them, showing them how to have a healthy relationship with God, with each other, and with the lost people around them. Jesus didn't rely on information alone. He provided adequate imitation. He's probably on to something here.

It is laughable that Jesus' disciples were still clueless right up until his death. But when the empowerment of the Holy Spirit came upon them, these guys resembled their Lord, Jesus. We can take solace in this.

I wonder what would have happened if someone would have pointed out to me sooner that there was something off with my basketball shooting form? More importantly, I wonder what would happen in our churches if we believed that discipleship must include supplying both the right biblical information and real time imitation? It worked for Jesus. It worked for Paul. Why wouldn't it work for us?

Editor's Note: Jeremy Wike is pastor of Community of Hope Grace Brethren Church, Columbia City, Ind. He and his wife, Tonya, live in Columbia City with their four children.

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP AND THE CHURCH

by Tom Julien



The role of the church is to equip believers for ministry (Eph. 4:11-16), providing the biblical context for discipleship.

Because relatively few churches were fulfilling this role, discipleship became identified with the ministry of parachurch ministries, such as Navigators and Campus Crusade. These organizations performed an indispensable role in bringing the responsibilities of discipleship to individual believers, but this discipleship often lacked the dimension of the church.

The local church is indispensable for biblical discipleship. It is the focal point of the plan of God, which is to bring all things together under one head, Christ (Ephesians 1:10). God has appointed Christ to be the Head over everything for the church, which is His body.

The local church is an expression of the Body of Christ and must strive to become an equipping church.

Every church is to grow up into Him who is the Head. “From Him 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 NIV).

Marks of an Equipping Church

In an equipping church, the leaders do not merely do ministry but equip others to do ministry.

Doing ministry is not the same as equipping others to do ministry. Equipping is involving others personally in ministry. Of course, you cannot equip for ministry without doing ministry, but you can do ministry without equipping others. An equipping church is a church where empowering people takes precedence over directing activities.

An equipping church unleashes the mid-level leadership of the church, the “joints and ligaments” that allow the church to function as a unified body in which every part does its work (Ephesians 4:16).

The mid-level leaders of the church are its joints and ligaments, joining the members to the Head. They are gifted by the Spirit and given by the Lord to the Church. Their task is not primarily to assume ownership for the ministry, but to prepare God’s people for involvement in works of service. When the leaders take this seriously, leadership development occurs on two levels. First, the leaders themselves develop their leadership abilities. There is no better way to learn than to train others. Second, by

DOING MINISTRY IS NOT THE SAME AS EQUIPPING OTHERS TO DO MINISTRY. AN EQUIPPING CHURCH IS A CHURCH WHERE EMPOWERING PEOPLE TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER DIRECTING ACTIVITIES.



being equipped, everyone within the church is able to discover their giftedness and ministry skills, allowing the church to fulfill its five ministry functions: outreach, proclamation, evangelism, shepherding, and training. There is probably no deeper fellowship than fellowship in shared ministry.

An equipping church is a church committed to helping everyone within the church rise to his full potential for Christ. It is a local church committed to helping all become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ by seeking to involve every believer into a meaningful ministry. Leaders in equipping churches focus on potential rather than problems.

Values of an Equipping Church

An equipping church values people above programs. Members realize that they are participants in the ministry and not mere consumers. As members of a ministry team, they participate in the planning process and assume ownership of the team's plan and goals. This produces teamwork, motivation, a satisfaction in experiencing spiritual progress, and a sense of identity.

An equipping church values people's potential above their position. They do not diminish the importance of vocational ministry. Rather, they elevate the importance of non-vocational ministry, breaking down the distinction between clergy and laity with respect to ministry functions. Equipping churches focus on the potential of each member, believing that each member has been gifted by the Spirit to fulfill a role in the church. This means, as we will see later, that the church is prepared not only to connect people with each other, but also with defined ministries, providing the coaching and training necessary to enable these people to serve at the maximum of their giftedness.

An equipping church values purpose and performance above organizational structures.

Most churches work through commissions and committees, often elected by the church for specific areas of the life of the church. Though some committees function as teams, many of them are composed of members who come to meetings merely to listen and to react to the planning and programs of the leader. Becoming an equipping church means transforming committees into teams. In a team, each member has specific responsibility for an area of the ministry. He or she is given the privilege of showing creativity in developing a ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-16 is a foundational passage for the church:

- The Church is the body of Christ
- Christ is the Head
- Leaders are the joints and ligaments
- Every member is essential for the functioning of the body.

The Lord gives leaders to the church to fulfill the five functions of the church's ministry:

- Apostolic: reaching out to the world
- Prophetic: proclaiming the Word of God with authority
- Evangelistic: calling people from the world into the body of Christ
- Shepherding: caring for those who are in the body
- Teaching: providing a foundation of truth for the members of the body

The role of these leaders (the joints and ligaments) is to involve believers into ministries.

The term *katartizo*, which is often translated equip or prepare, means literally to connect. It is on-the-job training. It designates the function, not a result; in Ephesians 4:12 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17 the emphasis is not on perfecting but preparing.

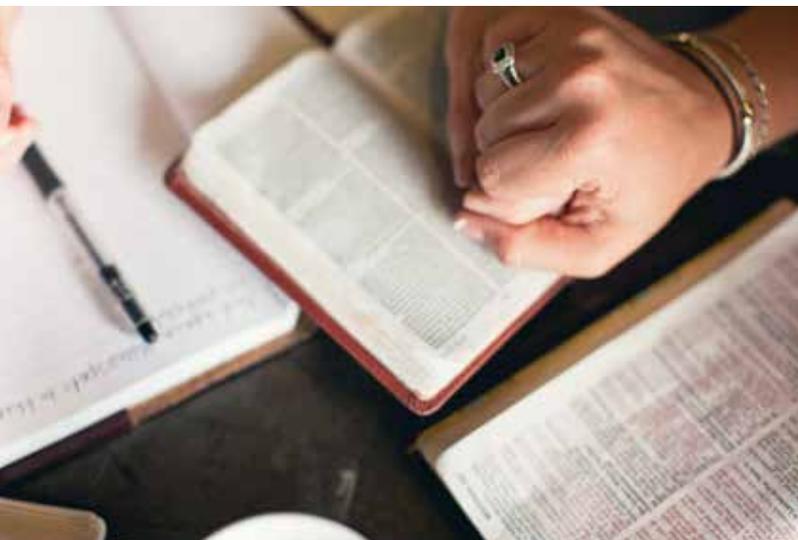
Therefore, to equip is more than to train, though training is a necessary component. To equip is to connect, and this means involvement in ministry. This is most effectively done through the creation of ministry teams.

Why become an Equipping Church?

Picture a local church where the vast majority of Christ-followers are growing spiritually and ministering effectively to each other and to lost individuals within their spheres of influence:

- Where the ministry is not program or staff driven but people driven;
- Where the ministry is not owned only by the ministry leaders but by the people;
- Where people are actively involved in ministry teams based upon their ministry passion and spiritual gifts;
- Where people intentionally minister to those within their neighborhoods and workplaces, and lost people are becoming Christ-followers on a regular basis; and
- Where ministry leaders are not burning out from carrying the ministry on their shoulders.

UNLESS PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED TO RISE TO THEIR SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL, THEY WILL SIMPLY BE CONSUMERS OF THE MINISTRY AND STAGNATE SPIRITUALLY.



Yet, equipping others is a neglected ministry

For many who are in ministry, becoming an equipper rather than a doer represents a radical transformation. Ministry leaders are usually trained to do ministry. This is where they find their identity and fulfillment. Further, their training allows them to do it faster and more efficiently than to delegate it to others. If they are paid staff members, they sometimes feel guilty when someone else does what they consider to be their job. They find it easy to assign tasks but are less comfortable in delegating responsibilities and often have little time to personally coach those who are getting involved in significant ministries.

Because of this, many ministry leaders define equipping simply as preaching, discipling, or teaching, rather than involving people in meaningful ministry. Though it is true that these ministries play a role in equipping, they represent only certain aspects of equipping and not the essence.

The neglect of equipping is one of the principal reasons for the decline of a local church. Unless people are motivated to rise to their spiritual potential, they will simply be consumers of the ministry and stagnate spiritually. If new people are not challenged for ministry, they will be less likely to stay in the church. People will find their interests elsewhere than the church.

Unless equipping is the underlying culture for the entire scope of ministry, the church is falling short of the plain pattern of Ephesians 4:11-16, no matter how many discipleship and training programs it might have.

Becoming an Equipping Church

Becoming an equipping church does not mean implementing a new program. Equipping is an organic approach to ministry. It must be implemented relationally. It is a commitment to intentionally making Ephesians 4:11-16 the DNA of the church and its ministries. Because equipping is not a program, the focus of an equipping church is to individually develop its equipping culture in a way that is suitable to its unique needs and distinctiveness.

The first step in becoming an equipping church is an intentional commitment of the leadership of the church to apply Ephesians 4:11-16 in the ministry of the church. Since being an equipping church is not a program, but an approach to ministry, it does not necessarily mean changing the organizational structures of the church.

This will require the designation of a coordinator who will assume the responsibility for the oversight of the equipping ministries in his church. This can be the pastor or someone the pastor designates. He will create an equipping team to oversee the equipping ministries.

Every effort must be made to seek to infuse an equipping culture into all aspects of the church, which will encourage all the members to rise to their full potential for the Lord. This will involve communicating an equipping mindset. The equipping approach must be implanted into the church as a whole, through the preaching and teaching ministries. The church must be able to bring Ephesians 4:11-16 alive—a passage woefully neglected in many churches.

The following outline of a four-week sermon series could be very effective in achieving this mindset:

1. The glory of the church as the body of Christ, for whom and from whom ministry exists.
2. The five functions of the church: outreach, proclamation, evangelism, shepherding, training.
3. The role of the “joints and ligaments,” the mid-level leaders of the church, gifted by the Spirit and given to the church to equip the saints.
4. Growth and unity being the fruit of an equipping church, with members attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

WE MUST CONSTANTLY EMPHASIZE THE INDISPENSABLE ROLE OF PRAYER—NOT JUST THROUGH LIP-SERVICE OR ROUTINE PRAYERS AT THE BEGINNING OF MEETINGS, BUT PRAYERS OF GENUINE FAITH.



Guidelines for Incorporating an Equipping Culture

1. Infuse dependent prayer into all aspects of the ministry.
2. As leaders, get your value not by how well you perform, but by how well you equip others in effective ministry.
3. Move people from being ministry consumers to ministry contributors, seeing potential in every member.
4. Transform elected committees into open-ended ministry teams in which each member can exercise creativity in his responsibility.
5. Equip your “mid-level” leaders; the joints and ligaments that hold the body together, by giving them the responsibility as ministry team leaders.
6. Identify ministry leaders by function, not by position, making little distinction between paid staff and volunteer workers.
7. Help people discover their spiritual giftedness by involving them in ministry rather than merely taking spiritual gift inventories.
8. Combine ministry instruction with ministry involvement, meeting the felt training needs that grow out of ministry experience.
9. Keep the focus of equipping on the people, not the process, seeking to help every member rise to his full potential.
10. Remember and teach that ministry is not what we do for the Lord, but what He does through us.

Implementing an Equipping Culture

Following the guidelines above, the following are five steps toward an equipping culture. For facility of memory, each begins with the letter “I”.

Intercession We must constantly emphasize the indispensable role of prayer—not just through lip-service or routine prayers at the beginning of meetings, but prayers of genuine faith. 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 various ministries of training.

Identification Every church must be able to identify its ministry needs. For many churches, this is difficult because most

the ministries are fulfilled by the paid staff members. When ministry needs are identified, equipping churches 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. Effective equipping churches develop ways of identifying those the Lord has sent them to involve them in ministries.

Involvement An equipping church believes that every member is gifted for ministry. Therefore, it 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, then allowed to become involved in ministry. However, the best training is in ministry rather than for ministry.

Instruction We have mentioned that involvement in ministry creates a thirst for further training. Training that is disassociated with ministry can easily become theoretical. In addition to the 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 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 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 must 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.

Never forget: equipping is a journey, not a destination.

Editor’s Note: Tom Julien is the equipping pastor at the Winona Lake, Ind., Grace Brethren Church, and director emeritus of Encompass World Partners. He and his late wife, Doris, served as missionaries for many years in France. He has authored several books, including The Three Princes (BMH Books, 2011).

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APPLYING UNCHANGING TRUTH IN A CHANGING CULTURE

by Clancy Cruise

For more than 100 years, the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC) has been on a deliberate journey to start churches and develop leaders in regions all around the world. At the “Margins” Conference last summer in Toronto, our network of churches took an important next step in that journey. During the annual business meeting of the FGBC, delegates unanimously voted to embrace and endorse the Charis Commitment to Common Identity and to join the Charis Alliance. This followed the historic 2015 gathering in Bangkok where representatives from many countries around the world met to unanimously approve this unifying statement of shared identity. I had the joy and privilege of being present that day, and it was incredible to see the unity and what God is doing in our midst!

With such strong support for the Charis Commitment to Common Identity being expressed by our delegates, national ministries, and our churches and pastors, the Fellowship Council (the leadership board for the FGBC) has felt led to prepare a new recommendation for delegates to consider this summer at Access2017, the national conference of the FGBC. (Access2017 will be held July 25-27 in Fremont, Ohio.)

Simply stated, this recommendation is to amend the FGBC Constitution to say: “The Charis Commitment to Common Identity (first adopted 2015) as approved by the national conference is the current expression of our ongoing quest to apply the unchanging truth of God’s Word to the constantly changing realities and needs of our world.”

The amendment will also require that member churches “agree to cooperate harmoniously within the parameters outlined by the Charis Commitment to Common Identity and the Position Statements of the FGBC.”

The “Position Statements” will be concise and carefully worded statements that seek to address or clarify specific issues of culture, theology, or practice within the ministry context of North America. In order to be adopted, each statement will require a 2/3rd vote of approval by delegates from member churches. The Fellowship Council plans to have some initial Position Statements ready for consideration prior to the meeting this July.

Do you have questions about these amendments? Go to fgbc.org/questions. Use this form to send us your questions and we will publish a Q&A page online before June 1.



Serving on the Fellowship Council in 2017 are, left to right, front: Larry Orme, Greg Howell, Doug Black, Phil Bryant, Greg Serafino, Clancy Cruise (executive director), Joe Cosentino, Ron Boehm, Tom Avey (Fellowship Coordinator); back, Kevin Pinkerton, Randy Weekly, Tim Hodge, Roy Halberg, Mark E. Lingenfelter, Scott Avey, Jeremy Wike, Doug Courter, and Adam Copenhaver.

However, new statements about identity and positions are not the end of the story! There is also a team working tirelessly on developing better ways to communicate who we are to the world around us, including a new “Doing Business As” (DBA) name for the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. We encourage you to stay tuned for some exciting announcements about these developments in the coming months.

After conference this summer, we will be shifting the focus of our attention back to our goals as stated in the Commitment to Common Mission. This document, written in 2008, calls for our global movement to focus on Church Planting, Leadership Training, and Integrated Ministry. So in the next round of Focus Retreats will have an important discussion about how we can do an even better job of starting new churches, training and deploying new leaders, and how to do good as we share the good news.

Editor’s Note: Clancy Cruise is pastor of Grace Brethren Church, Marysville, Ohio, where he resides with his wife, Sandy. They have four grown children and one grandchild. Clancy is in the second year of a three-year term as executive director of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches.

PREREQUISITES FOR DISCIPLESHIP

by Tom Julien

THE FOLLOWING ARE
TEN PREREQUISITES
FOR EFFECTIVE
DISCIPLESHIP:

- 1. Discipleship is the work of the Lord through the Holy Spirit.**
Discipleship is not what we do for the Lord, but what He does through us.
John 14:25-26, Colossians 1:29
- 2. The goal of discipleship is spiritual transformation.**
Conformity is outside-in; transformation is inside-out.
Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 3. All true discipleship must be bathed in dependent prayer.** Paul prayed continually for his disciples.
Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:9, Philippians 1:9-11
- 4. The purpose of discipleship is knowing the Lord, not simply knowing about Him.** We are to abide in Him as He abides in us.
John 15:4, Philippians 3:10-11
- 5. Effective discipleship emanates from love for the disciple.** The focus of discipleship is the disciple, not the process. *1 Corinthians 13:1*
- 6. All discipleship must be based on the Word of God.** The discipler must correctly handle the Word of truth. *2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16*
- 7. Effective discipleship focuses on the entire person: knowing, being, doing.**
We must instruct, as teachers:
1 Thessalonians 4:1
We must model, as mentors:
1 Thessalonians 1:6
We must involve, as coaches:
1 Thessalonians 2:11-12
- 8. Effective discipleship recognizes the spiritual value and giftedness of the disciple.**
The Lord gives to the Church those who are gifted for significant ministry.
Ephesians 4:16
- 9. Discipleship, as every aspect of ministry, involves spiritual warfare.** Discipleship is always opposed by spiritual forces.
Ephesians 6:8-10, Matt. 13:19
- 10. Effective discipleship results in reproduction.** Every disciple is commissioned by the Lord to make disciples of others. *Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:2.*