# Implanting an Equipping Culture—a Biblical Approach

From Leadership Training Team discussion, August 29, 2011 (Mike Taylor, Dave Lawson, Tom Julien)

*(This document is for further dialogue and revision. It is a starting point for the development of a working document for churches wishing to become E-Net churches.)*

E-Net (the Equipping Network) is not a new program being proposed to the Grace Brethren Fellowship. It is a team of churches committed to intentionally infusing Ephesians 4:11-16 into the total scope of their ministries.

Because E-Net is not a program, the main focus of each of the E-Net churches will be to individually develop an equipping culturesuitable to its unique needs and distinctiveness. E-Net churches will not seek to create a system that would be a pattern for all churches. On the other hand, E-Net Churches will be encouraged to share their experiences with other churches having the same equipping vision.

The Biblical approach for implanting an equipping culture is the process of sowing and reaping. As a basis for reproduction the Lord established the laws of the seed, soil, sower and harvest. These provide an organic path for implanting an equipping culture into any church, no matter how it is organized, or how large or small it is.

**The Law of the Harvest**

To effectively implant an equipping culture, a church must begin with the end in mind. There must be a clear vision of what an equipping church will look like. In the most simple terms, an equipping church is a church in which the ministry leaders (on all levels) are focused not primarily on *doing their* ministry, but *equipping others* to do ministry. In an equipping church, ministry leaders find their identity not primarily in what *they* do, but in their ability to involve *others,* helping them “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

To achieve this, the church must effectively break down the wall between professional ministers and laypeople. It must emphasize people above programs. Function must be given more importance than position. Since leaders in an equipping churchbelieve that every member of the body has a function to fulfill, they train themselves to see potential in others, and to involve them in places of service.

An E-Net Church is not simply a church which maintains a program of studies, though such a program can and should be one of the tools for creating an equipping culture. An E-Net Church is a church in which the equipping mindset is infused into every aspect of the church’s ministry.

**The Law of the Seed**

What we harvest is determined by what we plant. The most challenging aspect of producing an equipping church is identifying the necessary seeds. These seeds are the basic principles of an equipping culture. When properly identified and planted, they have the capacity to germinate and produce an equipping culture in any church.

The following are some examples of equipping principles:

Prayer must be integrated into every aspect of the equipping process.

Equipping churches are organized around ministry teams and not committees.

Involvement in ministry reveals giftedness.

Mentoring and coaching are essential elements of training.

Equippers are sensitive to the potential of all the members of the body.

Equipping churches identify the joints and ligaments of the church.

Our task as members of the E-Net Task Force is to complete the above list and choose the principles that we consider to be indispensible, in order to motivate churches to integrate these principles into the mentality of the church.

**The Law of the Soil**

After arriving at a clear vision of an Equipping Church and an identification of the seeds that will produce an equipping culture, ministry leaders must make a careful examination of the soil or soils into which they must plant these seeds. Each church represents a unique soil, and each church contains a diversity of soils. The seed must be adapted to the soil.

The starting point for this examination is an understanding of the current culture of the church. The nature of the church’s current culture will determine effective approaches in planting an equipping culture. Here is a partial list of some questions that will help in this examination:

1. How old is our church?
2. How do the people respond to new approaches?
3. Is the church evenly distributed in age groups?
4. Does the pastor play a CEO role?
5. Is the church staff-driven?
6. What is the function of the church board, elders or otherwise?
7. How are new people assimilated into the body?
8. Are church commissions open-ended or closed?

**The Law of the Sower**

The Law of the Sower breaks down into two parts. First, to effectively equip others, the equipper must be a model of what he is seeking to impart into the lives of the disciples. Mentoring and coaching are indispensible in preparing others for ministry. No matter what the disciple learns cognitively about ministry, he will nearly always follow the example of his trainer.

Second, the equipper must effectively implement the five steps of implanting an equipping culture:

1. Intercession. Intercession is not just saying a prayer at the beginning of a meeting, It is authentic communication with the Lord of the Church, and is therefore the indispensible element for equipping. Intercession must underlie every aspect of the equipping process: motivating the believer by bringing vision and a sense of value, enabling believers to discover their giftedness, opening ministry doors, filling the trainers with the Spirit, giving the ministry eternal value, and bringing encouragement to God’s servants.
2. Involvement. Involvement in ministry is necessary for discovering giftedness. Equipping churches effectively provide open doors for ministry involvement, through ministry teams that are open-ended. Equipping churches are sensitive to the potential of *all* the believers, and actively motivate all believers to serve by inviting them to involvement in ministry rather than waiting for them to volunteer. Few believers will refuse the invitation to serve if they are being asked to get involved in something of value, and not just asked to fulfill tasks.
3. Identification. According to Ephesians 4:7 and 9, believers are equipped by the Lord through spiritual gifts, then given to the church for the work of the ministry. One of the discipleship ministries of an equipping church is to help believers identify their spiritual gifting. Involvement in ministry allows believers to become aware of their gifting. However, involvement must be followed by the kind of discipling which will give scriptural instruction concerning spiritual gifts which will allow the believer to discern the gifts he has received. Spiritual gift inventories without involvement in ministry and personal discipleship can easily become self-centered rather than ministry-centered.
4. Instruction. Ideal training is training *in* ministry rather than *for* ministry. Believers who are involved in ministry and have begun to discover their spiritual gifts begin to have an appetite for learning—not simply acquiring more knowledge, but also skills and character development. In an Equipping Church instruction will include both mentoring and coaching, focusing on the specific needs of the learner, as well as more general training in structured situations.
5. Inspiration. Encouragement is a basic element for the Equipping Church. Encouragement is not flattery, but positive affirmation. It is the sincere expression of appreciation for the ministry of others, focused on concrete examples. Encouragement motivates by creating a positive image; our effectiveness is directly related to whether we have a positive or negative image of the way we are fulfilling our ministry. We improve others not by pointing out what they have done wrong, but what they have done right. The best kind of encouragement is spontaneous.

***Looking ahead***

Further dialogue will focus on developing a working list of the basic principles of an Equipping culture, and sharing how they are being implemented in each of the E-Net churches.