

Equipping: The Key To Growing Every 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.
- Where ministry leaders are not burning out from carrying the ministry on their shoulders.

Ephesians 4:11-16 provides the key for this type of vitality being the norm for your church. This passage contains the formula for approaching ministry that creates ministry energy and ministry effectiveness. Yet it is so simple that it is missed by many pastors and ministry leaders who face frustration from leading churches that have plateaued.

The *What* of an Equipping Church

An Equipping Church is a church in which the ministry leaders find their value not only in doing ministry, but in equipping and involving others in ministry. This often occurs through creating ministry teams that allow leaders to empower and coach Christ-followers in their ministries to fulfil the five functions of the church: outreach, proclamation, evangelism, shepherding, and training.

- According to Ephesians 4:11-16, the Lord gives leaders to the church to connect the believers to the church's five-fold ministries: outreach, proclamation, evangelism, shepherding, and teaching.
- The-role of the ministry leaders is to equip/coach each Christ-follower to effectively minister in a particular ministry and within their sphere of influence. This results in their spiritual growth, the growth of the church and the reaching of the lost. Christ is the head of the church and He has given ministry leaders to the church to serve as the ligaments enabling each member to be involved in ministry.

Some qualities found in many equipping churches:

1. Infusing dependent prayer into all aspects of the ministry.
2. Leaders getting value not by how well they perform, but by how well they equip others in effective ministry.
3. Moving people from being ministry consumers to ministry contributors, seeing potential in every member.
4. Transforming elected committees into open-ended ministry teams in which each member can exercise creativity in his responsibility.
5. Equipping the "mid-level" leaders; the joints and ligaments that hold the body together, by giving them the responsibility as ministry team leaders.

6. Identifying ministry leaders by function, not by position, making little distinction between paid staff and volunteer workers.
7. Helping people discover their spiritual giftedness by involving them in ministry rather than merely taking spiritual gift inventories.
8. Combining ministry instruction with ministry involvement, meeting the felt training needs that grow out of ministry experience.
9. Keeping the focus of equipping on the *people*, not the *process*, seeking to help every member rise to his full potential.
10. Remembering and teaching that ministry is not what we do for the Lord, but what He does through us.

For many who are in ministry, becoming an equipper rather than a doer represents a paradigm shift. Ministry leaders are usually trained to *do* ministry. This is often 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.

An Equipping Church encourages *all* members to rise to their full potential for Christ.

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.

The Why of an Equipping Church

Unless equipping is the underlying culture for the entire scope of the 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.

An Equipping Church allows Christ the Head to express Himself through the body.

An Equipping Church unleashes the joints and ligaments of the church.

An Equipping Church infuses spiritual power and vitality into the entire body.

An Equipping Church produces a deep level of teamwork and fellowship.

An Equipping Church multiplies the ownership and the impact of the church.

The How of an Equipping Church

Equipping is more than training. The root meaning of the word is *to connect*. The closest terms we have to translate are to involve and to coach. Though training is a necessary component of equipping, you cannot equip without connecting them to ministry. Equipping transforms members from being consumers to being collaborators.

Equipping is not a fixed program. Each church will develop its equipping ministries in accordance with its organization and culture. Equipping is a journey, and not a destination.

The following are five main components of an equipping culture.

Intercession. 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 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 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. Effective 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, 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 theory. 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 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 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.

Becoming a part of the Equipping Network

The Equipping Network is an informal team of churches committed to intentionally infusing Ephesians 4:11-16 into the culture of the church and its ministries.

Every church engaged in any kind of equipping ministry is invited to become a part of the Equipping Network. E-Net churches represent three levels of commitment.

Communication level. These are churches who desire to receive regular communication from the E-Net team and to apply whatever equipping concepts are applicable in their situation.

Commitment level. These are churches intentionally committed to equipping through involving people in ministries, under the leadership of a designated equipping coordinator. This can be the pastor or someone the pastor designates.

Collaboration level. These are churches which become pilot churches in their districts, encouraging collaborating with other churches and sharing experiences in the application of equipping principles.

If you are equipping your people for ministry, we see you as a part of the Equipping Network. Let us know how we can work together. Contact Ed Short (edshort@cenational.org), Tom Julien (tjulien@encompassworld.org) or Tim Sprankle (tim.sprankle@gmail.com).