

Encounter, Embed, Equip, Engage

Introduction

In late 2009, the staff of FBC began praying, thinking and discussing the direction and purpose of the church. We asked questions like “what kind of disciple do we want to see produced at FBC?” and “what are the steps in the process of moving toward maturity?” What is outlined below is our attempt to answer these questions. We want to clarify our purpose, define our direction and outline clear expectations at every level of involvement.

Make no mistake, this cannot be accomplished by a clever plan or catchy wording. We acknowledge that we can do nothing on our own. We are in complete reliance on the grace of God, the power of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We want to be faithful to Him above all else.

Encounter

This is the first step in the process- the entry point. We want FBC to be a place where people encounter God and God encounters them. We think of Moses at the burning bush. We think of Isaiah in the year that King Uzziah died and he saw the Lord seated on the throne. We think of Paul on the road to Damascus when he saw a great light and heard God speak. In each of these scenes, God was revealed in his glory and those who encountered him were forever changed. That's what we want to happen here at FBC. We want God to be on display and his glory revealed. We believe this happens as we sing his praises and study his word, as we grow spiritually through discipleship, as we fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, and as we involved in the different ministry opportunities available at FBC.

It must be noted that an encounter with the Almighty is not always a pleasant thing. When our sin meets His righteousness, it can be painful. Isaiah said, "Woe is me. I am ruined." Paul was put on the ground and lost his sight for a time. However, this pain is not without purpose, for it is only when we recognize our brokenness and need that we find help. When we cry for help, He answers with grace and mercy. One of our favorite songs says, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved."

While worship services and small group Bible study are the primary ministries for encounter, it must be understood that this step is the foundation for everything else. In other words, it's not as if a person encounters God, then moves on to the next step and leaves this one. NO. We want to continue to encounter God as we move through this process and always be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Therefore "encounter" will be the foundation or undercurrent of all the other steps.

Purpose

-To provide both believers and non-believers with the opportunity to encounter Almighty God and be forever changed.

Direction

-This is the entry point, the front door if you will. We must consistently be challenging people to move forward to embed in a small group.

Expectation

-To be here. To Look. To Listen. To respond.

Embed

Once individuals have encountered God and their lives have been changed, we want to see them embed in a small group. Embed is defined as “to set or fix firmly in a surrounding mass.” We believe this best takes place in small group Bible study. Here, individuals connect with others and find encouragement, accountability, fellowship and instruction. It is clear from Scripture that God never intended for us to live in relationship with him all by ourselves. Christian discipleship happens in community and not in isolation. We must recognize that community means more than just being in the same room at the same time with other people. There is intimacy, sharing and openness. In Acts chapter 9, we see Paul embed with the disciples in Jerusalem shortly after his conversion. On the heels of Pentecost in Acts chapter 4 we see the new believers gathered together to pray and study and they shared everything they had

This is what we want to see happen at FBC. We want to see lives changed through an encounter with God. Then we want to see those people involved in a small group community that encounters God together and provides biblical community and sense of belonging, along with accountability and encouragement.

Purpose

-To connect our lives with each other's. To develop a true sense of community and relationship. To begin growing as a disciple of Christ through the study of His Word.

Direction

-This is where the roots go down and people begin to grow- together. The goal here is to be challenging them not just to stay in the warm and comfortable environment, but to begin preparing for service in God's Kingdom.

Expectation

-To invest in other people's lives and invite them to invest in yours. Openness, honesty and vulnerability are keys here. It's more than just having a “support group” group around you. It is being like a family.

**Celebrate Recovery is another excellent opportunity to embed and seek God as we work through hurts, habits and hang-ups together.

Equip

When a person has encountered God and embedded with His people, they will begin to mature in their faith. Part of maturity in the faith is a desire to serve. In order to serve well, a person must be trained. This is what the equip stage is all about- training disciples of Christ for particular service in his Kingdom. This happens mainly through special classes held on Sunday evenings, though some equipping will also occur in SGBS and Worship services as well as in our youth and children's ministries.

In the Bible we see characters involved in the equipping stage. Young Timothy is a great example of this as he is mentored by the older, more mature and more experienced Paul. Paul shows and teaches him the in's and out's of ministry. He teaches him about doctrine. He teaches him about people. He shows him the ropes so that he will be ready to serve. We also see some equipping take place between Jesus and the 12 disciples. Often Jesus would take them aside and give them extra insight and instruction. He was clearly preparing them to continue the work after his departure.

At FBC, we want to see disciples who are being trained for ministry. They are going deep and preparing to serve the King in His Kingdom.

Purpose

-To provide both maturing believers with the tools they need to faithfully fulfill the work God has called them to.

Direction

-The goal here is training. Often it will be very specific with an eye toward a particular ministry or project. Other times it will be general, preparing believer for faithful, everyday living and ministering.

Expectation

-Discipline. Hard Work. Dedication.

Engage

The final step (which really has no end) is to put the training into action. This may come in a variety of forms- ushering, security, childcare, committee service, teaching, choir, proclamation, mission trips, service projects...

This step is where people move from being consumers of ministry to contributors of ministry. It also is the link back to the beginning and all the other steps of the process. There must be people who are willing to lead in encounter opportunities. There must be people willing to invest themselves in developing and leading a small group. There must to people willing and ready to teach and equip other in order for them to be ready to engage.

This is where the rubber meets the road, and the possibilities are endless.

Purpose

-To put mature believers to work in the Kingdom of God for the glory of God.

Direction

-This is where the end is tied to the beginning. Here people begin to participate in providing opportunities for others to encounter, embed and equip.

Expectation

-We need dependability here- people that we can count on. We need responsibility- people who will make sure the task is accomplished. We need passion here- people who are clearly called and joyful in the work.

Conclusions

There are a few final ideas we need to keep in mind when considering this proposal.

Emphasis on the Word of God

Since the Bible is our sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, it must be at the center of every step. It will do us no good to try to encounter God without His Word. It will be futile to build a community around mere common interests and not His Word. Every step of the way we must constantly be studying the Scriptures.

As we gain more knowledge, our relationship with Jesus has the chance to grow. We, as a staff, believe a healthy church family is one where individuals grow in their relationship, but we realize growth relationally is difficult, if not impossible, without a correct knowledge that comes only from His Word.

Spill over

As nice and neat as all of this may look on paper, we must remember that there will be some overlap at times. Some programs serve multiple purposes. Some people are involved at various stages. That's okay. We must remember we are dealing with God and with people- neither will always fit into our system of structure.

Evaluation of programs

Adopting this process as our guide will allow us to evaluate current and future programs of the church. If an activity is not accomplishing any of these purposes, then it needs to be dropped.

Movement is key

The goal in all of this is not arrival but movement. We want to see people making progress through the process. When someone has an encounter with God and their life is changed, we need to celebrate, and immediately challenge them to embed. When someone is clearly embedded, they need to be challenged to get equipped and plug in to an area of service. At every step there must be a challenge to move further.

Groups will get smaller, expectations get higher

We do not expect that the number of people involved in engage ministries will be anywhere near the number at an encounter ministry. There will undoubtedly be people that do not progress in the process. Part of that is due to the fact that the expectation of those involved at higher levels is greater. For instance, we depend on and expect that Sunday School teachers will be present each week to lead their class.