

Prepare to Serve

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Date: 24 June 2012

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[0:00] Well, God willing, in just 10 months, we'll have as many as 200 people coming to Grace Fellowship Church for the annual General Assembly of the Churches in our Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America.

This is no small endeavor to be host to the delegates sent from our 72 churches. The planning and preparing and carrying out of this week of ministry will take literally thousands of man hours. And it's an event of such significance in our lives as a church that I believe it deserves to have some time deliberately spent to prepare us for it.

And I'd like to do that this morning in this hour to get God's perspective on what it is that we're planning to do, to see it as he sees it, and then to consider what areas we might be of service to God's servants.

First, a bit of information about the General Assembly itself. As I said, we have something like 72 churches all across our country and one in Canada. And each church can send as many folks as they want, but as far as the business meeting goes on Wednesday of that week, each church is allowed to have two delegates that will vote.

[1:27] Often it's the pastors who come. Some bring their wives. Some deacons come. Three days of meetings. There's reports from the new member churches. There's reports from church planters and missionaries.

Report from the professor of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies. There's the business meeting itself. Discussion times. Devotionals each morning. Times of prayer.

Various committee meetings are taking place throughout the General Assembly. And then every evening there's preaching sessions. And you all are invited to sit in on all of that.

So mark your calendars. April 23rd through 25th. The Administrative Council is a group of around 15 pastors. And they come in early, as early as Saturday before, the week before, or just a few days before, for business meetings preceding the General Assembly.

Then on Monday, most of the delegates arrive and the General Assembly begins on Tuesday morning and is concluded by Thursday evening. So how should we look at this opportunity we have to host this event?

[2:47] Well, it's not the first time we've done it, so many of you know a bit what to expect. But I'd like for us to see it, first of all, as an opportunity to refresh God's servants.

A marathon is being run in 90-degree temperatures with the humidity like we have known it.

And we have placed a table at the mile marker 15 to hand out glasses of water. And so runners come in, parched and dragging, hurting, needing encouragement.

And they leave having drunk the water refreshed. They are able to pick up the pace. Their running is different because of what they received at our little booth along the way.

Well, that's something of a picture of what we pray will happen next April. So our hearts were moved this General Assembly this year out in Chicopee, Massachusetts.

[3:51] It's one of the morning devotional speakers, a pastor from Long Island, New York. Shared with us how just several years ago he was at an all-time low in his ministry.

His chin was dragging on the ground. He was feeling despondent and despairing. And he came to the General Assembly and he found the Lord working in his heart through the ministry of the word and through the fellowship of the saints.

And he returned home encouraged and he persevered in the work. And now that church is seeing what he could only call revival. A revival of interest in the things of the Lord among the body of the church itself, but also conversions of sinners and unconverted folks coming along to the services.

That sort of thing happens, I don't think it's presumptuous to say, at every General Assembly. People come dragging. They go home encouraged. They go home encouraged. The GA is like an oasis where men come.

They're often slugging it out much alone. There's many of the churches that don't even have a plurality of elders. And so the pastor is by himself.

[5:12] And there's many difficult places. And so they come together and they find refreshment and then return home. Ministers' wives as well get discouraged.

And so they too have found encouragement in each other's fellowship and in the ministry of the word. So we have an opportunity then to be a part of that ministry of refreshing the saints of God, his servants, to see them returned to their churches with a fresh zeal, hope, and energy.

Psalm 35, 27 says, The Lord delights in the well-being of his servants. And so should we. And this is an opportunity to labor for the well-being of some of his choice servants.

So whether directly or indirectly, we'll have an opportunity to do that. Secondly, it's an opportunity to promote the unity and work of the association.

Few things build love and unity as face-to-face coming together and meeting and praying with each other. It gives us an opportunity to bear one another's burdens, to pray together, to rejoice in each other's victories, to grieve and weep with each other's setbacks.

[6:34] And all of that tends to build unity among our association. That too is something that the Lord Jesus prizes highly among his churches. How good and how pleasant it is when brethren dwell together in unity.

There the Lord commands the blessing, even life forevermore. It's what Jesus prayed on that night before he was crucified.

That we might be one so that the world might know that God has sent him. So coming together is an activity that promotes the unity and work of the association.

It promotes not only the unity but the work of the association. There are things that we can do together as a group of churches that we can't do as individual churches. And so we have this business meeting.

We make determinations on what work we'll do together for the next year and a budget and such as that. Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work.

[7:36] And so by hosting the general assembly, we give the churches the opportunity to get to attend to the work of the association and to strengthen its unity.

Thirdly, it's an opportunity to grow in Christ's likeness. Now turn to Philippians chapter 2 at this point. It's an opportunity to grow in Christ's likeness. And I don't know about you, but I need every one of those opportunities I can get.

And what we see in Philippians chapter 2 is the attitude and the mind of Christ as the exemplar and the example for us to follow.

Notice verse 3 of chapter 2. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Each of you should look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

[8:46] Well, what was that attitude? Well, he who being in very nature God did not consider that something to be grasped. It was not robbery for him to claim to be God.

He was rightly God in his own stead, and he didn't hang on to that. But rather, he made himself nothing. And he took the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness.

And oh, how he served. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And it's that servant heart of the Lord Jesus, that self-humbling to serve another that is held before us as what attitude is to be found in our hearts.

To be forgetful of our own rights and even desires. Self-forgetful, self-sacrificing, becoming poor to enrich others.

That's what Jesus was doing. And Paul says, no, you have the same mind. Here's an opportunity to do that. To set aside, not just for that week, but even in the days leading up to it, things that we could do for ourselves that we might give ourselves to serving the good of others.

[10:14] And as you do, you bear the likeness of the Lord Jesus. And that's true greatness in his kingdom, to be the servant of all. And then it's an opportunity to minister to Jesus Christ himself.

If I said, rather than in a year from now, or in April of next year, we plan to have some 200 ministers here. Instead, I would have said to you this morning, around April, we plan to have the Lord Jesus Christ visit Grace Fellowship Church.

And we want to get ready for his coming. And you're going to have an opportunity to have him in your home. And you'll have an opportunity to feed him and to take care of him. Would that put any different slant on what it is that we're doing?

Well, that precisely is the way that the Lord Jesus talks about things, doesn't he? In Matthew chapter 25, that familiar passage, the end of the age when the Lord Jesus returns and gathers all the nations and all people that have ever lived before him for that great judgment day.

And he separates the sheep from the goats and those who are righteous and those who are wicked. And it's an awesome scene. And then the king says to those on his right, some shocking things.

[11:37] Verse 34. Then the king will say to those on his right, come, you who are blessed by my father. Take your inheritance. The kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me.

I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will ask him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?

Or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in? Or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?

The king will reply. And here's the whole principle of his kingdom. I tell you the truth. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

[12:44] And the same is true of the absence of what was not done for the least of those that belong to Christ. It was not done to the Lord Jesus. And on that basis alone, all mankind will go to their places to everlasting torment, to everlasting life.

Because every Christian, every true Christian is one who serves Christ's people. That's one of the marks of a born-again person, that they love the brethren, isn't it?

And so every Christian is one who serves Christ as he serves his people. That's the way Jesus takes it.

What's done to the least of these. So when these pastors come in and these pastors' wives come in and you serve them, Jesus takes it as having been done to himself personally.

There's such a union between Christ and his people that what's done to them is done to him. That gives us tremendous opportunity. Have we thought of that?

[13:47] To have the Lord Jesus in our homes. To feed him. To have the Lord Jesus in our homes.

Do not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

So as you help his people, he counts it as having shown love and work to him. Again, works of love in helping his people is work and love shown to him and he takes it as the same, as if he was the one you helped and served and worked for and loved.

So it's an opportunity to minister to the Lord Jesus Christ. And fifthly, and lastly, it's an opportunity for great reward. This very passage is verse seven says land that drinks in the rain, often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed, receives the blessing of God.

But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end, it will be burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case.

[15:29] Things that accompany salvation. Like what? Like works of love. As he goes on to say, God is not unjust and he will not forget your work.

And the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show the same diligence to the very end in order to make your hope sure.

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. A person's harvest shows what kind of ground he is.

And the harvest that the Christian looks for is that which God himself will give when he returns. And he says God's not unjust and he won't forget any of your works.

Any of your love that you've had for his people. He'd be unjust. He wouldn't be a righteous judge if he did forget. But he won't forget.

[16:30] All that you've done, all that you're doing to help his people will be remembered and rewarded. In Matthew 10, the Lord Jesus was instructing his 12 disciples just before he sent them out to preach the kingdom of heaven.

And in verse 40, he says, he who receives you receives me. And he who receives me receives the one who sent me. And in the context, we see what receives me, what it means to receive these whom Christ was sending.

It meant that they would be welcomed into their homes and fed and their message welcomed. That's what it meant to receive them. As they went out with the word, they were received into the homes and their message was received.

And then Jesus says this, anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet, who comes with the word of God, he will receive a prophet's reward.

And anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. Ministry to a prophet because he is a prophet, because he is a prophet, because he is from God, will be rewarded with the same reward that the prophet himself gets.

[17:53] Remember David's law among his ragtag band of warriors that those who stay by the stuff will share equally in the rewards and the spoils of victory with those who went up to the battle.

They share the same reward. Now, that's what the Lord Jesus is saying here. They had different roles in the same battle and those helping shared equally with the ones who were out doing the battle.

That's what Jesus is saying here. These folks that are coming to us in April, many of them are ministers of God's word. But if you help them, you will receive a minister's reward.

Verse 42, he goes on. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward. So we'll have many opportunities to give cups of water to God's servants that week of the General Assembly, to give them rides to and from the airport to church from where they're staying, to receive them into your home, to give them breakfast, to serve them snacks and meals at the church, to encourage them with your joyful service.

Not one smile will lose its reward. And so a generous man will himself prosper and he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

[19:25] There's reward in that too, isn't there? That as we refresh others, we find the refreshment splashes upon us. And who served more than the Lord Jesus?

And what did he find? He found by experience that it is much more better, much more blessed to give than to receive. And he found his own heart refreshed and prospering as he refreshed others. So that divine mathematic is puzzling to a worldling. It doesn't add up to the worldling that in putting out, we actually receive back. No, it seems like whatever I don't spend on myself in the way of time and money and energy is lost to me.

It's a gain to somebody else, but it's a loss to me. And God says, no, you don't know kingdom math. That those who refresh others will refresh themselves.

That it's far more blessed to give than it is to receive. And so by self-protection, the worldling misses out on much of what could come back to him.

[20:35] And so it's an opportunity for great rewards. Well, that being said, we need all hands on deck.

What we're doing is we're taking a survey in the next two weeks. This is the survey. And on the survey, there are about a dozen different committees to serve on for this week.

And we're going to go through these committees just briefly to explain what they are, answer any questions you have so that you can fill that out and get it back to us.

within two weeks. What we're asking you to do is to put a check beside the committees that you're willing to work on.

And so you can see all the committees and there's a little blank out beside it. If you'd like to do something within one of those committees, put a check beside that. That'll take our eyes to that committee.

[21:42] And then if there are certain things that are listed under it that especially pick your interest, and you say, yeah, I'd like to do that, underline that. Feel free to write all over it to say, well, I'd like to do that.

I'm wondering about this. If you've got questions, you can come and see me. But, yeah, just feel free to write in any comments that you have or suggestions or willingness to serve in different ways. So a checkpoint beside the committee, and then you can further underline different aspects if there's something that especially appeals to you. So there's, first of all, the registration and database and clerical committee.

And a lot of this is now being done online. One of the churches two years ago set up a program where folks can register online.

And as they enter all their stuff online and pay online, it divides their names out into where they're staying and when they're coming in to the airport, if they need picking up.

[22 : 53] And so it puts things neatly into categories, something that before had to be done by hand. So that has reduced this first, the work of this first committee tremendously. But we're still going to need some folks who know something about computer programs.

And so that's not to discourage you if you don't know computers. The day that the folks come, we're going to need a bunch of folks there at registration ready to distribute the materials to each guest and so on.

Then there's any questions? Maybe just pause. Any questions on that one? All right. Housing.

There's work that needs to be done ahead of time, finding out rates and locations of hotels that we can post on the registration forms so that folks know what is available in the area.

Often we can get reduced rates from block rooms that are reserved. We can get reduced rates from the transportation. We can get reduced rates from the transportation committee, where our guests are staying and how to get them back and forth to the church.

And then there's also the opportunity, and this needs to be highlighted, willingness to house guests and how many guests could you keep.

[24 : 15] Every year there are some folks that come who their churches don't have the financing to send them and to put them up in a hotel. And so they'll come if they could stay in a home.

Others just prefer homes. And so what's offered is as many homes and rooms as we have, first come, first serve. And on that basis, folks come and stay in homes.

Some of you did that the last time and had a great time getting to know some of the folks. And I know that some of you have even had ongoing relationships with those folks subsequently because of that.

So that's housing. And then transportation, organizing and planning. But we'll also need just a lot of drivers to drive from the airport to the church or to the hotels and then between the church and the homes during the week.

Audio-visual, pretty self-explanatory. Advertising, we'll want to let the folks know, especially the evening services, the public is welcome to come and be a part of that evening service.

[25 : 34] Excursions. Excursions. Our afternoons are pretty much free for about four hours. Some folks have committee meetings that they're meeting in.

Some folks go back to their rooms to rest or just hang out at the church and fellowship. But we also have established just the idea of presenting different places to go sightseeing in the area where the General Assembly is being held.

Some people like to go out to Miller's Barn and play basketball. But this committee is just charged with developing interesting places to go in the area and collecting that information and giving several options to our guests.

And then there's ladies' activities. There is a tea plan for the ladies on Wednesday morning. And usually I think there's around 30 or 40 ladies that are in attendance.

And so that's an activity we try to have for the ladies. And then other activities as well. Maybe an excursion that would interest the ladies more than the men in the afternoons.

[26 : 53] And then food is a huge one. There's a lot of preparation that needs to be done. But then there will be a lot of serving.

A lot of food to make and bring in. And two meals a day. The lunch and the supper. And the snacks in the morning. And then cleaning up the kitchen each evening.

So that's going to require a lot of help there. Decorations. Just to seek to make things attractive. Cleaning support committee here.

This is going to need gophers that can just run errands. Set up chairs and tables. Be available during the general assembly for janitorial duties.

And things that come up on the spur of the moment. Child care for those who are working here and have children. And book room.

[27:57] Workers are often appreciated to man the book tables during the afternoon hours. Sometimes fellows will be shopping for books.

And this isn't just our book room. They have books brought in. Lots of books. Pastors love books. And so that's what we're referring to here.

And so we're asking to sign your name there at the bottom. And return it to a box that we'll have out on the little table in the foyer in two weeks. At least by July the 8th.

We'd like them back. And we're not going to. You know. If you don't know exactly where you're going to be. Do we know where we'll be tomorrow? We're not going to hold you to this.

But if you'd like to serve in any of these ways, put it down. And if something comes up, we understand that. We'll take those surveys. And we'll get the committees formed.

[28:56] The chairperson on each committee. And then we'll start preparing. In early October, our coordinator, Gordon Taylor, plans to be coming to Bremen to meet with each of the committees to be sure we're on target.

And the work that we're preparing. And so that's kind of a running overview of what we're looking at. I wonder, are there any questions? We're also wanting to encourage high schoolers, your high schoolers, to take part in this. We'll be handing out these survey forms after the service again this morning for any folks that weren't in here.

But what questions do you have? I don't know if you can answer this, but I've got a lot of room to house guests, but I can't cook. Can I eliminate it?

Well, if you can buy some Cheerios and milk, some rolls and fruit, I think you'd be all right.

[30:03] Because all we're asking those who house folks to do is to give them breakfast before they come. And so there's no cooking other than breakfast. And I think, well, it's up to you what you want that breakfast to be.

But you know from staying in hotels what sometimes they would have if they were having a continental breakfast at a hotel or something. And then there are snacks around 10, 30 in the morning, too.

So if you didn't give them enough, they've got plenty here at the church to supplement their breakfast. So don't let that stop you if you're not able to cook bacon and eggs each morning.

And it is just Tuesday morning, Wednesday morning, Thursday morning, probably Friday morning. Some of them will be leaving Thursday night. Some, most of them probably Friday morning.

So, yes, Steve? The evening sessions, are they at 7? That's correct. Usually at 7. Jim? Yeah, under the transportation, willing to be a driver.

[31:07] Is that, or under the transportation, that entail all that? Or can you, by default, just be a driver? Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Just underline or circle driving. That's why you might just want to be served with that.

And if you have a vehicle, you could write that in. I've got a vehicle carrying so many people. Or I wouldn't have a vehicle, but I'm willing to drive. Whatever. Not your dump truck, Jim.

But something else. Yeah. Can't you just see that at the airport?

Jim holding up the sign, and then outside, there's the pickup truck. I thought it would be a match next to just get a direction. No.

Good question. Any other questions? Any other questions? All right. Well, let's... Let's... We're going to begin praying Wednesday nights from time to time for this week.

[32:11] If the Lord doesn't add his blessing, people don't go home refreshed. And so everything that we do, we need the Lord's blessing on.

And so we'll be beginning to pray. And this should be a note that you'll hear many announcements, calling together committees and so on.

But keep it in your prayers. And in the next two weeks, your prayerful planning and thinking how you might be helpful. Anything else then before we close?

Jim? That passage you talked about about refreshing others, that's in Proverbs, correct? Can you hear me? Yeah. That was Proverbs 11.25. A generous man will prosper.

He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. 11.25. Very good. Good. Pastor Bob, could I ask you to lead us in prayer as we conclude this morning?

[33:10]