



Reaching Past Friends and Family:

More with Gina Brown

November 23, 2023

Transcript



Sara Hayden: When you think about the Faith Studio, would you consider the tools that you use to be very embracing of technology? Or like, if you were to say, okay, zero is no technology, 10 is like super futuristic, where would you locate you all as a community? Is it more ancient and timeless? Is it more like... or is that not even the right paradigm?

Gina Brown: We use technology. I'm not technologically savvy, but I try (laughs).

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And actually, actually, Sara, um, being in the apprenticeship program with you and you would say, "Just hold on, I'm not sure what I'm doing. Look at this."

Sara: (laughs) That was just, like, in general for every subject (laughs).

Gina: (laughs) Yeah. And so for me, I saw you be unashamed about it and like, "It is what it is. We're gonna do this anyway. We'll get there." You know?

Sara: Yeah. I thought we were going to my video. No one can hear it. Okay, well... (laughs)

Gina: Yeah. Last year, that was the approach I took. Like, I don't need to be embarrassed about this. Let's just, you know, everything doesn't have to line up and be smooth, and we're gonna do what we do. And so, that's how I look at it. I would say we're probably about a five.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: There are some things I use, I got quite a number of platforms that it takes to run the show.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: Right? (laughs)

Sara: Right.

Gina: But as far as the feel of the sessions, it's very comforting.

Sara: Mm.

Gina: Because we also put a good emphasis on self-care, so I want this to be like the space that you carve out for yourself in your busy week. You carve this space out so that you can come into community with like-minded people and sit and relax awhile and have a conversation that's not related to diapers or when is dinner or what time we get out of the carpool. And it's a little bit harder to find now in this particular community. And deconstructing communities, it's harder to find because you don't know anybody who's deconstructing, not at your church.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: You know, it's kinda hard to find that. I had, uh, one participant, one faith fan member, say, you know, they're so grateful there's such a sense of freedom and liberation in being able to honestly say where you are in your faith, that you don't believe certain things, that you're questioning other things, and that you're worried about certain things, you know?

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And that's been very inspiring that we don't have to pretend with God and we don't have to pretend in our faith.

Sara: Mm-hmm. How sacred it is to hear someone's story or, or to be held in that way, as you said. And many of us have had experiences in retreats or time away where conversations have unfolded in a slow, held kinda way where you're held, where your conversation's held and you are also. I'm curious, when you think about self-care, that in a lot of deconstructing spaces there's also a clear call to activism.

Gina: Yeah.

Sara: And I think there's something special about having a place where the stories and the reflection and the contemplation are center stage, period.

Gina: Yeah.

Sara: Do you wrestle that? I mean, or do you try to hold it into that space and say, let's just be here for this moment and give this to ourselves? Because we are doing things all the time.

Gina: Yeah.

Sara: And it's not in tension with our faith, but this moment is for this.

Gina: Again, like I said, I think Faith Studio is something that I wish I had. Also, my life is extremely busy as a wife and a mom and a... I got a job now (laughs).

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And it's all of these things trying to juggle at the same time and that's when things are going well. And then when things are not going well and you have all of these things happening, a lot of the times as women, we will prioritize everything above ourselves.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And so, at the end of the day, one of the images that I have, this relates to a scripture, but it talks about giving from your overflow. And that image that comes up for me is an image of a teacup, very fine bone china teacup that's sitting there, and, you know, it's a very sloppy thing to have a bone china teacup and to stuff slush over the sides. And you got tea sitting in the bottom of the saucer, right?

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Gina: It's just not how it's supposed to go (laughs).

Sara: (laughs)

Gina: But that is the overflow from which we're supposed to give, but what happens is a lot of the times we're giving from the dregs at the bottom of the teacup.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Gina: We can't stop our lives to fill up the teacup, so how do we begin to learn how to find spaces in which we can fill and give at the same time? Unfortunately, there seems to be more spaces that are detracting from us than providing to us.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And so, what I desire Faith Studio to be is like an oasis in the desert where you can come put your hair down (laughs), take your bra off, you know-

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: ... and sit and relax (laughs).

Sara: Yes.

Gina: And just be who you are in your natural state. And you don't need to be concerned just for that hour, hour and a half. Just focus inwardly, focus on yourself, focus with other people who you know and understand have stories beyond what you know of them in this space, but we decided to come together at this particular time and talk about life-giving topics for us.

Sara: I love that. And when the overflow happens, it's something that is fluid-

Gina: It's rich.

Sara: ... and rich, and it's not a deprivation.

Gina: Yeah.

Sara: It's an abundance.

Gina: Yeah. And then, you know, every now and then we have good conflict (laughs).

Sara: (laughs) Okay, yeah.

Gina: Because that's part of the learning process, right? Most of us are really good friends at this particular point or we understand what the intention is, but we don't always think the same way all of the time. And so, you're trying to articulate your point, and the other person's trying to articulate their point. But my thing is, let us be open to hearing another perspective. And we have this thing in the culture writeup that talks about allowing silence to minister to us.

Sara: Hmm.

Gina: Sometimes some of us need to learn how to step forward, some of us need to learn how to step back. It's not about let me respond so that I can win the argument or I can be right or I can be heard, but it's about deep listening-

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: ... really deep listening so that I can hear you. Because sometimes people can be using particular words, but they're saying something different. And if you're not looking behind the words to hear the heart, you'll break a thing.

Sara: Wow, that's powerful. Is there a way that you end the conversations when you all gather together?

Gina: I used to have all this, what I refer to as, like, ritual.

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Gina: Like, when we start, we start like this.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And we do this, and we say this. And then when we end, we do this. But what I found is usually if there's a presentation or a teaching or whatever, we just allow that to go until it feels like it's done.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: In church spaces, they talk about the benediction. I don't provide a benediction. I don't like too much distraction because I want you to be able to go away from that. I don't know what you have to do after you get off from Faith Studio, but I want that thing to remain with you, what you got to remain with you. And so I'll tell you, "You know, I really appreciate you for being here, for taking the time out to come and sit and conversate with me tonight. I love you." And then it just click off (laughs).

Sara: Yeah, yeah.

Gina: I think there have been times when I found it's been very necessary to pray, and I will pray. Other times, to speak words of encouragement or speak words of life to somebody or to the group, and I will do that. But it's all very, like, how I feel, what is happening at that time.

Sara: Oh, Gina, I just love that you are cultivating this and what it is cultivating for other people and their communities represented in them.

Gina: Yeah. It's very exciting, right? One of my ministry desires is to be able to walk along somebody.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: I might not be able to change it for you, but maybe I can help you in some kinda way. And so to me, this is like getting to walk with multiple people at the same time. And you're walking with me, you're helping me, I'm helping you. We are a community.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: Community is kind of antithetical to our Western lifestyle-

Sara: Okay.

Gina: ... but it's the space in which we flourish the best.

Sara: What you said is so complete. An- and other things you wanna say in this conversation about that, about our resistance to community or just, you know, it not happening because of how we live? What's that about?

Gina: Yeah, I think there are quite a number of reasons why that is, but I think it's particularly outstanding to me because as I've mentioned before, I was born and raised in Bermuda, which is, you know, a Caribbean, Atlantic, British experience (laughs). It's a lot of things happening at the same time.

Sara: (laughs)

Gina: And I would say what we pull from our Caribbean experience as I did in my family was learning to live in community. I was a child of my parents and my grandmother's community. I was accountable not just to my mom and dad, but to my uncles, my aunts, my nana, my nana's girlfriends (laughs).

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: Accountable to so many different people who were there for my nourishment-

Sara: Mm-hmm.

Gina: ... to build me up and help me to grow. That's my base and my understanding. And yes, you have to answer to a lot of people, and yes, you have to be accountable when you... Bermuda's a small place. When you step out in the community, everybody knew who you were. That's Gloria's granddaughter (laughs).

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: That's so-and-so's niece. Everybody knew who you were, but what that cultivated inside of me was I have this huge family, this extended family of people who care about me and who love me and who are pushing me forward-

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: ... who see me-

Sara: Hmm.

Gina: ... who actually see me. And my lived experience in America is that success is about bootstrap pulling-

Sara: Hmm.

Gina: (laughs)

Sara: Hmm.

Gina: ... how you can stand isolated in your autonomy separate from other people in competition.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: That doesn't make very well for living in community.

Sara: Wow.

Gina: I don't say that to criticize, but it is definitely an observation.

Sara: Yeah, it's hard to have community when you look back and think, oh gosh, so many of my community experiences were competitive-

Gina: Were competitive.

Sara: ... or survival oriented.

Gina: Mm-hmm.

Sara: Or this false notion that there was a winner and then there were people who fell in behind them. I mean, that's how we raise our children to participate in things, right? (laughs)

Gina: Yeah. I mean, we had that too in Bermuda, right?

Sara: Yeah. Okay.

Gina: But I'm talking about my family of origin, my community-

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: ... my cultural understanding of what it meant to be with other people.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And I was the only child in my family until I was 20.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: (laughs) And so it was a lot of attention.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: So when my cousin came, I was glad she came 'cause I needed to get on with my life at 20 (laughs).

Sara: (laughs) Yeah.

Gina: Right? (laughs)

Sara: Right. (laughs)

Gina: I can appreciate that now at this age.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: But at that time, it felt like too much attention. But I remember those lessons. I remember what that was able to do for me, and it's part of the confidence that I live with and walk with and walk in now.

Sara: Yeah. I feel like that's a good place to transition in this conversation because it brings us back to one story of your childhood, your origins, and how it connects so beautifully with what you have chosen to do and how people have chosen to journey together.

Gina: Yeah. And you know, when you think of, um... because you still have church metrics in your mind-

Sara: Yeah. Okay.

Gina: ... how church is supposed to work-

Sara: Right.

Gina: ... how success is defined. I don't make a demand on people to be there all of the time.

Sara: Yeah. That's what Jon said. Yeah (laughs).

Gina: Really? (laughs)

Sara: Yeah, he's just like, "You know what? Yeah, you wanna come or you say, I need a break. I need to ju..." And he's like, "Absolutely, do it. Yes."

Gina: Yeah.

Sara: "We support you."

Gina: Come and be a part of the things that you feel you need to be a part of, but if you can't make it to the next one, that's okay. And if you decide you don't wanna come at all anymore, that's okay too. I understand that (laughs), but there's also the wrestle of, are we growing?

Sara: Yeah. Yeah.

Gina: But do we need to grow in that way?

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: So, I would say that we are reaching past friends and family stage, and the numbers are dwindling. But then things are changing because during COVID, people wanted to be together more. I think people had more time to be together more. But what we're seeing now is people want to participate with us, but they don't have the time. And so, there's been this demand of, "Can you record these things for us, please?"

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: And so, this is where we're getting into podcasting, and it's the same things, but it's different, right? We're having one-on-one conversations with people who we don't know that we're talking to.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: (laughs)

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: But they're experiencing us as though they were watching us.

Sara: Yeah.

Gina: Talking about technology, we just live in a different world now, and how things are experienced is just really, really different. And so, just trying to go along with that understanding and trying not to nail everything down-

Sara: Right.

Gina: ... so tightly or make it look like something in particular because I have a great idea and I think this is what we should do, but just letting it flow.

Sara: Yeah. Mm. Gina, thank you so much for this conversation and so many others. I'm grateful to call you a friend.

Gina: Yes, girl (laughs).

Sara: (laughs)

Gina: Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm totally appreciative of everything that you have done and offered to New Worshiping Communities, and how you bring this new way of doing church to the forefront, it's absolutely phenomenal. The stories are phenomenal. The experience is phenomenal of how God is moving so greatly on people and creating new things. It's just a privilege and a honor to be involved.

Sara: Mm. Thank you, Gina.