

Starting a Fellowship

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How do we go about starting a fellowship? Wouldn't it be great if we had a simple little formula we could apply and instantly have a fellowship? I don't have a formula, but I do believe that, just like in planting a crop, there are certain things we can do to increase the odds of our success. No farmer would ever expect to have a great harvest if he merely walked into an unprepared field and tossed seeds into the air. The good farmer prepares the field, tills the soil, and properly plants the seed. His diligence in watering, weeding, and fertilizing directly affects the size of his harvest. I believe that, just like the farmer, there are certain fundamental things we can do to affect the success of our fellowships.

A fellowship can be any gathering of saints who come together to glorify the Father and His Son. The objective of the fellowship is "to make disciples" and help us all conform to the image of Christ. That gives us a lot of latitude in activities and options that can be called a "fellowship." A fellowship does not have to be a teaching fellowship; it could be a prayer fellowship, a music fellowship, a healing fellowship, or whatever else you think of. However, all fellowship activities should direct us to Christ.

During the past few years, I've found that prosperous fellowships have a few common elements, which I've listed below. Let me know if you have others that I've overlooked.

- ***Have a nucleus of at least two committed partners.*** I believe it is very important to team up with others who share the same vision and heart for the success of the fellowship. This is not to say that you couldn't do it on your own, but it is very helpful to share the load with another. Also, there are going to be times when you feel worn down and your partner will be able to help lift you up. I'm reminded how Jesus sent his disciples out witnessing to the towns in groups of two's. There's a lesson in that for us to learn.
- ***Stay consistent.*** It's important to set a time and place where you will be meeting, and then stick to it. Fellowships have the greatest success when they meet consistently each week, on the same day, same time, and at the same place. In general, when you meet every other week, people can get confused about which week you meet. Meeting inconsistently allows people an easy reason to talk themselves out of coming.
- ***Stay committed.*** Your commitment to the success of the fellowship is vital. Life has its way of popping up with all types of reasons that talk us out of meeting. I guarantee that once you make the vow to start fellowshiping, the enemy will throw everything your way to distract you. There were many nights when no one came but my wife, Lori, but we still faithfully sat down for prayer and reading the Word together. God must be very proud when we stay faithful to our vows for service to Him. This is another good reason why it's very helpful to have a partner, so that if one wants to quit, the other can encourage him.
- ***Pray often.*** I hesitate to write this as number four because it is really number one. When you begin to fellowship and serve God's children, you have just volunteered for service on the front line of the spiritual battle, and prayer is your principal offensive weapon. You will need to pray often and fervently for your fellowship. When we first started, Lori and I would

pray every day over breakfast for the fellowship, and most especially for the Lord to open doors for us to speak the Word, which brings me to the next item.

- ***Talk to people.*** You can't expect people to come if you don't invite them. I know that most of us are frightened by the prospect of "witnessing" to people. I've tried to stop thinking of it as witnessing. Instead, I think of it as: I have something great and I want to share it with others. Don't talk to people with the agenda of trying to get them to your fellowship—they'll see through that in a heartbeat. Rather, find out about them, what's happening in their lives, what are they looking for, how can you serve them? Remember, it's the goodness of God that leads men unto repentance. You be the vehicle by which God's love is communicated to them.

- ***Stay flexible.*** You don't want to have a lot of predetermined concepts on what your fellowship should look like. The Lord knows the needs of those around you, so stay flexible to his direction. Every human is different and unique, so stay sensitive and ready to adjust to meet their needs. I know of one person who kept trying to have a teaching fellowship, but it failed continuously. Finally, he gave up, the Lord took it in an entirely different direction, and it flourished.

- ***Focus on the goals.*** The purpose of fellowshiping is to promote the Good News of salvation and to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). The fellowship should be a place to learn and grow in the Lord. You don't have to be a teaching fellowship to avail yourself of classes, books, and tapes. Your gatherings should be promoting sound teaching and producing spiritual growth in you and those that attend. Don't make the mistake of running a club instead of a fellowship. A club can be fun but not very profitable spiritually.

- ***Just do it.*** Sorry to borrow a common phrase, but there is a lot of truth to it. We have a tendency to discount ourselves or to think that, "I'll start once I get the house in order, or learn more of the Word, or..." Well, you get the idea. We may have fear, but the only thing that causes us to fail is giving in to those fears. Our desiring to have a fellowship is a beautiful thing in God's sight.

It melts the Lord's heart to see you striving to serve the good news of the Gospel to the world. A primary way to do that is by taking the lead and starting a fellowship. I encourage you to figuratively drive a stake in the ground of your town, claim this soil for the Lord, and take a vow to do your best to serve the Bread of Life to your community through your new fellowship.

Dan Gallagher

If you have already started a fellowship and would like to be connected to the CES Fellowship Community for mutual support and edification, let Dan know by calling 916-784-7117 or e-mailing him at CESwest@rcsis.net.