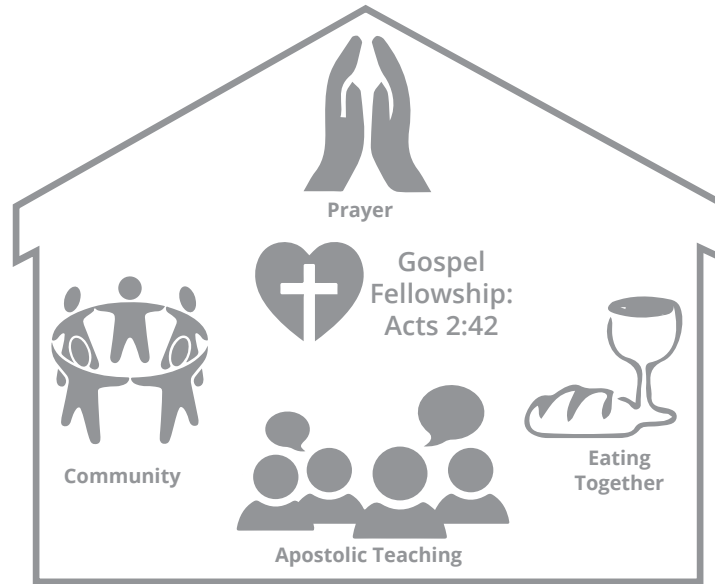


# GOSPEL FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

WESTERN VERSION 1.1



## 1 - INTRODUCTION

The true manual on how to form and run a Gospel Fellowship is the Bible, the Word of God. Remember that although you must keep to the timeless principles of the Bible, your Fellowship must always be adapted to your culture, your circumstances, and the gifts that God has given you. What works in one culture will not work in another; what works for one age group will not work for another. But the Spirit of the risen Christ will *always* accompany you, blessing and empowering you when you share his gospel, following the principles of the early apostolic church. The early church that was based on small groups of believers everywhere, multiplying with enthusiasm and breaking through all kinds of barriers to bring hope to the people around them.

## 2 - WHAT IS A GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP?

A Gospel Fellowship is a small group who meet together to share and to be encouraged in the gospel of Jesus Christ, following the simple model given in the New Testament.

## 3 - WHAT IS THE MODEL?

The New Testament model is found in Acts 2:42, where we are told that,

*The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community [i.e. fellowship], to their shared meals, and to their prayers.*



The four elements mentioned in this verse form the non-negotiable elements of every Gospel Fellowship:

When these four elements are present, then,

*The Lord add[s] daily to the community those who [are] being saved.*  
Acts 2:47b

Let's consider each of these four elements that result in successful gospel fellowships:

### i) The Apostles' Teaching

In the earliest church, the teaching of the apostles consisted in retelling stories about Jesus – what he had done, and what he had said. Paul reveals what the focal point of all these stories was, when he writes,

*I passed on to you as most important what I also received: Christ died for our sins in line with the scriptures, he was buried, and he rose on the third day*

## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

*in line with the scriptures.*

1 Cor. 15:3-4.

We can retell the stories about Jesus, because they are found in the New Testament.

### ii) The Community

A Gospel Fellowship is about creating a real community with each other.

This is a dynamic community that is continually reaching out in service beyond itself in everything that it does, and by growing, and replicating. A community is a group of people who share and do things together in real life.



First you need to be friends. Usually this means you have some common interests with the others in your fellowship. These could be football, school, or recovering from addiction. All of these can be platforms for also sharing and doing things together spiritually. A Gospel Fellowship is not just about the spiritual stuff in isolation from the society around them; a Gospel Fellowship is always looking for new ways to build authentic community.

### iii) Shared Meals

A Gospel Fellowship is always centred around a meal. It is clear from the New Testament that many of Jesus' greatest teaching moments were centred around meals. It is also clear that the early Christian groups ate together every time that they met.

Eating together in every culture says things like:

- We are family
- I accept you
- Let me share with you.

This is why eating together, including the symbols of the body and the blood of Jesus Christ, is such an important part of the Biblical model for Christian community.



### iv) Prayer

When the early Christian believers remembered what

Jesus had done, they weren't studying some irrelevant "doctrine." Jesus was alive! They had come together to communicate with and to share the power of the risen Christ.

That is why, together with telling stories about Jesus, prayer is so important. This is not prayer as a ritual, or prayer as a tradition, or prayer as an obligation, but direct communication with Jesus Christ.



### 4 - IS IT HARD TO SET UP AND RUN YOUR OWN GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP?

It is the Lord's doing. Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14). It is not hard at all; it can be as easy as inviting a group of friends over to your home.

However, starting and running a Gospel Fellowship still needs to be intentional, otherwise it is easy to drift away from the New Testament model into other "church" models that people know from tradition. You have to stick to the plan!

### 5 - WHAT IS A GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP NOT?

*i) It is not a denomination or a church in a traditional organisational sense.*

A Gospel Fellowship is fully interdenominational and welcomes people from all churches and denominations. Although a Good News Fellowship is not a denomination or a church in a traditional sense, wherever it functions it is church in the New Testament sense.

*ii) It is not part of the Good News Unlimited "organization."*

A Gospel Fellowship is fully independent of *Good News Unlimited* and has no legal or organisational ties with it or with other Fellowships associated with *Good News Unlimited*. The only tie that unites us is the love of Jesus and the gospel, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

A Gospel Fellowship may be called by whatever name the group decides to be known by.

*iii) It is not a church "service."*

## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

A Gospel Fellowship is very different to a traditional church, and so it does not necessary to have all the elements of a traditional church "service." The purpose of a Gospel Fellowship is to be as close to the principles of the New Testament church as possible within a contemporary setting.

### *iv) It is not defined by a creed.*

Although Good News Unlimited has a Statement of Belief, this is not a test of Christian fellowship, and is not binding on Gospel Fellowships.

### *v) It is not a theological forum.*

Gospel Fellowships do not exist to debate theology, or for anyone to try to impose their theological frameworks on others. While some people may be inclined towards this, you must stick to the four essential elements from Acts 2:42. It is not a place for arguing.

Your Gospel Fellowship is to be positive and affirming of other Christians. It is not to "convert" other Christians to your way of seeing things. Our mission is to the world, not to the church.

## 6. BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR RUNNING YOUR GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP

A Good News Fellowship basically looks like whatever you need it to look like so you can share the gospel. It should be easy, fun, and something that people will want to invite their friends to. If it's not, then you will need to change the way you are doing things.



The guidelines provided here are only that – guidelines. They are not a prescriptive recipe. Remember that every fellowship will look different based on culture, circumstances, demographics, and the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to the group.

### *i) Why do it?*

Because you have been saved by the gospel of grace, and everyone you know desperately needs what you have received. The kingdom of Christ does not grow unless people like you take action!



### *ii) Who is it for?*

Your Gospel Fellowship exists to create an environment in which the Spirit of the Risen Christ can convict, guide, teach and empower the members of your group. It is not about you. It is about sharing the gospel in its truest sense, in the way that the New Testament church did it.

Everything you do must be geared towards two things:

1. Creating a community in which the Spirit of the risen Lord can work. This means that the fellowship is for Jesus, who is truly present every time you meet.
2. Creating a community to which you can invite your friends to participate in, because Jesus is honoured when the gospel is shared and his kingdom grows.

Remember your Fellowship is for your friends who are not Christians or who do not go to church, or with whom you'd like to share the gospel.

That's why it is not just about reading the Bible together and praying together. It is also about eating together and doing fun things together – whatever friends usually do together.



As you do this, you will see Jesus powerfully at work in your Fellowship and in the lives of those who participate in it, and your own faith will be encouraged. BUT, if the main focus is on those who are already believers, your fellowship will stagnate and lose its purpose. Our Christianity must be always outward looking in nature, in fulfillment of the Great Commission of our Lord.

### *iii) What's the aim?*

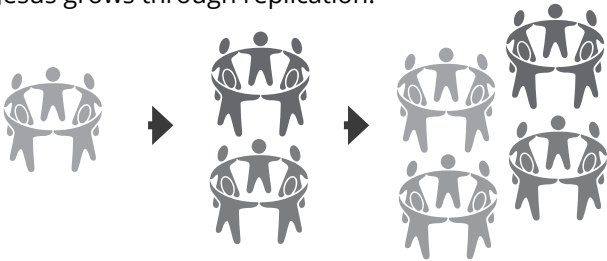
The aim is not to grow your Fellowship. It should grow by itself, and you praise God for that. Instead, your aim should be to grow more Fellowships.

When new people join your Fellowship, your aim should not merely stop at including them in your Fellowship; instead the aim should be to help them start their own

## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

Fellowship while they are still on fire for the Lord.

In everything your fellowship does, everyone should bear in mind that the ultimate goal is replication. The kingdom of Jesus grows through replication.



### *iv) So how does it grow?*

The example of Jesus and the early church shows us that the kingdom of God principally expands through personal relationships – people whom you already know or with whom you come into contact. You can spend all the money you have on advertising, but if the people in your Fellowship don't think that the Gospel is such great news that they want to invite people whom they already know, there will be no real growth.



### *v) How many?*

The early Christians spread on the basis of small groups. They mainly met in homes, and even the largest homes would not have held more than 30 people. See 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3–5; Philemon 1, 2; and Col 4:15. Small groups work best when they have around 12–14 people who are actively involved.

### *vi) Where?*

In your home, by the river, at the beach, at your local cafe, at your local prison... Do you get the picture? Church is where God's people get together. Think about it. You should get together wherever your Fellowship likes to socialise.



### *vii) When?*

Whenever it works for the members of your Fellowship.

However, you should be mindful that people's concentration spans these days are not long. Make sure that you are attuned to the needs of your group. Some Fellowships, for example, find that a Bible discussion of 30 minutes is way too long, but they can easily pray together for a similar period. Again, every culture will be different.

## **7 - WHAT HAPPENS AT A GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP?**

Let's talk a bit more about the four essential elements of a Gospel Fellowship.

### *i) Eating together*

Christian life and growth is fundamentally about community, and community is fundamentally about eating together.



It is amazing how often the greatest "Gospel" moments in the life of Jesus occurred while he shared a meal with his disciples or with others. So you should eat together as a central activity of your Fellowship. And when you do that, you should do what the early Christian church did: remember why you are a community in Christ by sharing the bread and the wine together that represent the Lord's sacrifice, and remembering it with a prayer.

Your meal should be simple, and done in such a way that it is not burdensome for you, and so that it does not detract from the study of the Word of God. Having everyone bringing enough for themselves and a little to share, and then having everyone pack up after themselves and take their own dirty serving trays, plates and cutlery to wash at home is ideal. Never leave a mess for your host to clean up!

### *ii) Sharing the Gospel together*

Your only book should be the Bible, focusing especially on the New Testament, and especially on the Gospels. The New Testament church would gather together to re-tell and share the stories about Jesus with each other and their friends. That was what church did back then, and this is what church should do today. As you read the stories in the Gospels, and as we discuss them, and we share how they apply to our own lives, we are truly sharing



## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here are some guidelines about how to do this. Again, remember that different cultures and circumstances will relate to these guidelines differently.

Point out to the group that there is to be no judgment, that there are no silly questions, and no right or wrong answers. You need to make it as easy as possible for new people to participate. For this reason, there is also to be no religious or church jargon or theological talk. We want to let the Word of God speak for itself to our hearts. This can be especially difficult for some thoroughly “churched” people to understand. You need to be able to read Scripture in your fellowship and see what it is telling us, without any theological gymnastics or jargon at all. If you invite new people to your fellowship and there is a vocal person there who is using church jargon to present complicated doctrinal ideas instead of what is clearly found in the Bible passage you are reading, you are likely never to see those new people again.

It is good to read through one of the Gospels, because the Gospels tell the stories about Jesus. The Gospel of Mark is the simplest and is structured around simple stories, so it is an ideal Gospel to begin with. Simply start at the beginning and read the first story. The next time you meet, you read the second story, and so on. When you have finished the Gospel of Mark, you can go on to another Gospel. The Gospel of John is ideal. Don't be tempted to go on to complicated books like Hebrews! Remember whom your fellowship is for and what its purpose is.

Pray before you read the Bible to thank Jesus for being there to guide you. If possible, before your meeting begins, you should already have asked someone if they are happy to pray. You do not want to embarrass anyone. Keep the prayer simple.

If possible, make sure everyone has a Bible in front of him or her in a translation that is plain and simple to understand. This is so that they can follow the reading, and not so that they can answer questions about it afterwards! This is not always possible, but it is ideal. And remember to never ask people questions that require them to have a Bible in front of them.

Ideally someone should volunteer or be chosen to read a passage from the Gospels. Be careful to ensure that they like reading and that they read well! Avoid the mistake of just going “around the circle” reading, since there are many people who will be uncomfortable about this. They won't tell you that, and you may never see them again!

This should be followed by a group discussion of the passage. Be careful about who leads this discussion. Often, the person who knows the most is chosen to lead the discussion, but be careful to make sure that this is the right person! What can often happen is that it stops being a discussion and becomes a sermon, and this destroys the effectiveness of the Fellowship. The discussion leaders should not be drawing from what is in his or her own head, but instead he or she should be letting the Bible speak for itself.



Anyone should be able to lead the discussion, even someone who has only joined your fellowship for the second time.

It is **very** important to keep the discussion focused on:

- 1) **Jesus** – What does this story tell us about Jesus? What is Jesus like?
- 2) **Salvation** – What does this story tell us about salvation?
- 3) **Us** – What does this story tell us about ourselves? How can you relate to this story?

Use simple questions like:

- *What do you think this passage is about?*
- *What thoughts came to mind as we read this passage?*
- *What is there about Jesus that most impresses you in this passage?*
- *Who do you relate to the most in this passage, and why?*
- *What can you learn about the gospel from this passage?*
- *What can you take away and apply in our life this week?*

Let the Holy Spirit Lead your discussion. The leader of the discussion should remember that they are not there to



## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

share their great wisdom or theological perspectives, but rather to let everyone in the group see “Jesus only”; from the passage that has been read. In fact, it is often better that the discussion be led by someone who is not a great “theological” or “religious” mind.

It is not a bad thing to let the group determine the direction of the discussion; in fact that can be very valuable. However, a skillful leader will know how to keep the discussion focused on the three points listed.



Use open-ended questions and don't necessarily expect people to have the Bible in front of them to look up answers. Try to include everyone in the discussion. Don't assume any knowledge of Christianity or of the Bible story. I once led a discussion in a group that often referred to Judas, only to have one of the people there say to me at the end, “I found all that very interesting, but I don't know who Judas is.” At all times, remember that the purpose of your Fellowship is to share the Gospel with those who have never heard it.

### iii) *Praying Together*



You should pray together immediately after the Bible discussion, while the impact of the Word of God is being most felt in people's hearts. Let everyone feel free to pray. The leader can offer the first and last prayer.

As you pray, share your testimonies, uphold each other in the Lord, and express your praise! Don't be bound by tradition and ritual. There are no formulas in prayer. A person's prayer can be an expression that lasts 2 seconds, or it can last 30 seconds.

You should teach your Fellowship that group prayer is a conversation with God, and not a ritual. So short “bursts” of prayer from various participants in the fellowship are ideal. And remember, as surprising as it may seem, that closing your eyes is just a non-Biblical tradition! Of course, in some cultures this might be essential, so you must balance this with the need to pray in the way that is appropriate in your culture.

Before ending the prayer, the leader can ask everyone if they have finished, and then the leader can offer the last prayer for everyone. You will be surprised at how long your fellowship will pray for if you just let people pray. And you will also be surprised at how powerful communicating with the risen Lord Jesus really is!

### iv) *Building Community Together*



At some stage during your Fellowship, plan a social activity. A Gospel Fellowship is a community, and a community loves spending time together and doing things together – and not just reading the Bible and praying!

So what is it that the members of your Fellowship love doing together socially? And more importantly, what would they love to do that they could invite their friends to! Remember the good news of the gospel is not just about you; it is about those who have not heard. So plan activities where you can just be a great community and have a fun time together with your non-Christian or non-religious friends.

What does that look like? It all depends on your age and your demographic. If you are older in age, then that will determine some of your interests. If you are a group of young families, you will have some things in common with other young families and that may determine how you socialise. If you meet in a prison, well that will provide some boundaries as well. If you are a group of young people, well... it's all up to you...

The idea is that you make friends first, and then you introduce them to the gospel, so your Fellowship must provide avenues for you to make friends, or introduce your friends to your community. Without being a real community, which means doing life together, and so socialising together, it is hard for your friends to see what is so great about your fellowship. After all, this is only what Jesus did. He made friends with people first, and then he shared his kingdom with them. So purely social activities are an indispensable element of your fellowship.

## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

### 7 - PRACTICAL ADVICE

#### i) Children



In the New Testament churches, households (families) gathered together. We don't know what special provisions were made for children. The reality today is that unless you have lots of children or no children in your Fellowship, it can be difficult to address the needs of different age groups.

Children should be valued and incorporated into your Fellowship. They can be involved in the various activities, and they can be spoken about, and prayed over.

If you have someone who is skilled at running activities for children, that person may take the children apart for part of the time and work with them. But bear in mind that it is difficult for one activity to appeal to all age groups.

How you organise your own fellowship will depend on the demographic of your members. If it consists of young families, then the children may be a major focus and factor for you. If it consists of young adults, then the situation will be different. In different cultures, children and adults will also relate differently, so how every Fellowship looks after their children will be different in different parts of the world.

#### ii) Music



We all love music. Music is a very important part of our social and cultural experience.

In some parts of the world you cannot meet together to talk about Jesus without having music, and in other parts of the world it is fine to have no music, especially in small groups.

We all love **our own** music. For this reason, you have to be careful about whether and how you use music in your Gospel Fellowship.

The truth is that in some cultures, music will be the number one reason why people choose to either come back again, or to never come again. Is that what you really want?

I very much enjoy Christian worship music. Unfortunately, in modern Christian culture, worship is almost exclusively about the music. The truth is however, whether for cultural or economic reasons, music is hardly mentioned at all in connection with the New Testament churches.

What does this mean for your Fellowship? By all means have music if that is what your Fellowship wants to do, but bear in mind the points made above. Make sure that everyone can participate; this means that everyone has printed words for the songs. Make sure that the music does not detract in any way from the Bible discussion and from prayer. Above all, you must keep the Word of God central!

And you must not feel that you cannot have a Gospel Fellowship if you do not have music. The reality is that many Fellowships have found that music is not essential at all!

#### iii) Good News Unlimited Presentations

Good News Unlimited broadcasts a weekly gospel presentation live, as well as having many archived video presentations available through its website. These are a wonderful resource for the sharing of the gospel worldwide.



So please feel free to use these in your Fellowship, although you should be aware that listening to a "sermon" doesn't of itself build community. The practice of having weekly "sermons" is a relatively late tradition within Christianity. Remember the four essential elements of Gospel Fellowships: the teachings of the apostles, sharing meals, prayer, and building community.

Bearing these elements in mind, our weekly broadcast, whether viewed live from our website in someone's home, or (because you are in a different time zone) watched later on, is also a perfectly acceptable way to have your own Gospel Fellowship. Just invite your family or neighbours to come and join you in your living room!

#### iv) Divide, divide, divide!

Remember that the aim is ultimately not to grow your Fellowship, but to create new



## GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIPS: THE MANUAL

---

Fellowships. This is about small groups, not large groups. If you ever reach the point when your Fellowship has a discussion about whether to divide or not, if you decide not to, you can almost guarantee that your Fellowship will stagnate, and most likely die.

### **v) What next?**

Please stay in touch with us so that we can rejoice together with you by sharing each other's stories of what the risen Lord is doing in our lives and for his church!



If you have more questions about how to start or run your own Good News Fellowship, please contact us, and we will answer them as soon as possible. And we might even include the questions and answers in future versions of this manual, so that Fellowships around the world can use your experiences to help them share the Gospel and grow the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

May the kingdom and the glory be His forever!

*Eliezer Gonzalez*

### **vi) How to contact us**

#### **General Email:**

[admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au](mailto:admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au)

#### **Eliezer's Email:**

[eliezer@goodnewsunlimited.org](mailto:eliezer@goodnewsunlimited.org)

#### **Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/GoodNewsUnlimited](http://www.facebook.com/GoodNewsUnlimited)

#### **Website:**

[www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au/](http://www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au/)

#### **Twitter:**

[twitter.com/GoodNewsUnlimit](https://twitter.com/GoodNewsUnlimit)

#### **Telephone:**

+ 61 7 5524 5040