

Fellowship Guidelines

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

(Hebrews 10:25 NIV)

A Simple Statement of Faith

For meaningful fellowship to occur there must be some beliefs that group members hold in common, or that they have at least agreed to respect. The following belief statements are intended to provide a minimal foundation. They are not intended to exclude people who have not yet embraced these beliefs as their own, but they are intended to limit other perspectives from adversely impacting the group. If a person cannot at least show respect for these beliefs, then they should not be allowed to be part of the group.

We Believe

We believe in one God, who created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1, 1Corinthians 8:5-6).

We believe in Jesus, who is the Christ (the one and only Messiah), the Son of God, Lord of all (Matt. 16:15-17; Acts 10:36). God so loved the world that he sent his only son Jesus, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Jesus died for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). Salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12).

We believe in the Holy Spirit, whom God gives to his people (Luke 11:13).

We believe that the Bible is inspired by God. It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2Timothy 3:16).

We believe that God's offer of salvation is extended to all people (Titus 2:11, Isaiah 45:22). God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4). *Whoever* believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). We understand that true saving 'belief' includes repentance toward God and faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21).

Things We Do Together

- **Worship and praise God.**
(Psalm 66; 92:1-5, 100, 103:1-5, 113, 150; Rom. 12:1, 15:9-11; Heb. 13:15)
- **Sing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.**
(Psalm 33:1-3, 89:1, 95:1-2, 101:1, 147:1; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13)
- **Give thanks to God.**
(Psalm 106:1, 107:1, 118:1, 136:1; Ephesians 5:20; Col. 4:2; 1Thes. 5:18)
- **Pray for one another.**
(Eph. 6:18; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 4:2; 1Thes. 5:17; 1Tim. 2:1-4)
- **Share about how God is working.**
(Psalm 71:17-18, 89:1-2; Acts 14:27, 15:3-4; 3John 1:3-4)
- **Share scriptures that have encouraged us.**
(Deut. 6:6-9; Ps. 1:1-3; Psalm 119; Acts 17:11; 2Tim. 3:16; 2Pet. 1:19-21)
- **Encourage one another.**
(1Thesalonians 5:11, 5:14; Hebrews 3:13, 10:25)
- **Instruct and admonish one another.**
(Acts 2:42; Romans 15:14; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 3:16-17; Hebrews 10:24)
- **Love and serve one another.**
(John 13:34-35; Romans 12:4-10; 1Peter 4:8-11; 1John 3:11-16)

Things We Avoid

We avoid disputing over secondary issues. We believe it is NOT beneficial for followers of Jesus to be divisive about beliefs that are not clearly and consistently presented in the Bible (Romans 16:17-18). There should be freedom among God's people to hold various viewpoints about such things. The intent is not to prohibit discussion about secondary issues, but to avoid being divisive about secondary issues. Secondary issues include such things as:

- Various understandings of the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit.
- The degree to which God predetermines or controls everything that happens.
- The degree to which Jesus is one with the Father (Oneness theology), or is distinct from the Father (Trinitarian).
- Various understandings of the end times.

- The various ways people outside of our own fellowship meet together and practice their faith.

We avoid theological debates in whole-group settings. Those interested in debating finer points of doctrine should aim to have those discussions with others who are interested when the whole group is not captive to the discussion. The intent is not to prohibit theological discussions, but to avoid quarrelling about theology (Titus 3:9; 1Timothy 2:8; 2Timothy 2:14, 2:23-26).

We avoid focusing on the problems of others. We prefer to focus on our own problems and our own service to God. This is not intended to restrict prayer for others, or to restrict requests for prayer for others, but is intended to help our main focus to be on ourselves and our own relationships with God and others (Matthew 7:1-5, 1Corinthians 5:12).

We avoid unbalanced sharing/prayer/worship/song. We individually avoid dominating group fellowship time. People should ask the group for permission if they want to share for more than a few minutes. When praying in a group setting, we aim to keep our prayers short (Matthew 6:7) and avoid continuing from one subject to another without allowing time for others to pray or participate.

We avoid unbalanced focus. We avoid focusing too much on a single person, family, or issue.

We avoid long monologue teaching times. A primary goal of this kind of fellowship is to develop deeper relationships. That generally doesn't happen when one person simply teaches and everyone else simply listens. Likewise, long audio or video presentations should be avoided during normal group fellowship time. The intent is not to prohibit teaching times or Bible study as a group, but to avoid long monologue presentations which lack group participation.

Some Key Perspectives:

Love and Honor One Another: It's easy to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to. It's easy to not show proper honor and respect to others. It's easy to put ourselves and our own ideas ahead of others. It's easy to want the group to meet our own needs

more than the needs of others. Such attitudes and actions are the opposite of what we should be doing.

Choose to Worship and Praise God: Times of good worship and praise often result from people choosing to worship and praise God, rather than waiting for it to happen. Many of the Psalms begin with an “I will...” statement (Psalm 9, 30, 34, 89, 101, 108, 111, 145 ESV, NIV, KJV). This indicates a choice that we should make to enter into worship and praise, and not wait for something else to take us there.

Make a Joyful Noise!: Let us sing unto the Lord, and not let poor musical skill keep us from worshiping. “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD!” (Psalm 100:1 KJV).

Music & Song Styles: Everyone seems to have different preferences for music, song, and worship. So, let’s try to enjoy the diverse ways that people like to worship God. Hymns, praise choruses, new songs, old songs, loud songs, quiet songs, fast songs, and slow songs all have a place in worshiping God.

Silence is Okay: Sometimes group worship time or group sharing time may result in periods of silence. That’s okay. Sometimes silence before God is part of worship, part of seeking God, part of experiencing God together.

Serving Others Together: As needs within the group or the surrounding community become apparent, the group members should prayerfully consider how they can be involved in helping provide for those needs.

Finally:

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

*And whatever you do, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

(Colossians 3:16-17 ESV)