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Starting A Home Fellowship

On more than one occasion, we have received a question similar to this, “How do you do a home fellowship?” While we are no experts on the subject, we thought we’d take a few minutes to tell you what we do or have done, as well as point out a few pitfalls to avoid.

This is not to be considered any type of authoritative instruction on how a group should run their home fellowship, nor are we stating that Scripture dictates things be done a certain way. Each group should adapt and decide what they wish to do and not do for themselves. We are only providing some of our own experiences and suggestions.

We do know that at some point, the disciples of Messiah did gather together in one another’s homes. We aren’t given any real detail as to these situations beyond being told that they happened and often shared a meal together. In fact, there is little instruction given to us in Scripture regarding how we are to have or govern a home fellowship. The majority of what we are told can be summed up in perhaps the most famous of verses relating to this topic:

Hebrews 10:23-25 (ESV)

[Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.](#)

The important thing to remember, is that it is a gathering of believers coming together to enjoy fellowship, maybe a meal, and for those inclined, to study Scripture. We should always be lifting up, or edifying the body, not tearing it down.

There are several occasions throughout the Torah relating to the appointed times that we are commanded to assemble ourselves for solemn assembly or a holy convocation. These are not situations we will be addressing in this teaching. We are simply going to be relating some things we have learned through our own experiences in having a home fellowship whether it’s just for a bible study or another function.

When Starting A Home Fellowship

Step 1. Define Your Purpose

It is always important for people to know why they are getting together. The purpose behind the gathering dictates, to some degree, the expectations and atmosphere of the event.

For example, it is not uncommon for people to host bible studies during the week, especially in mainstream Christianity. People attending such an event can expect to have a discussion relating to the bible. Obvious, right? Well, yes and no. As functions within a church, sometimes such events are meant to be used as an evangelistic outreach, other times they are not. It's important to define the parameters and purpose of your home fellowship. Questions that you may want to consider would include:

- Why are we gathering together?
- Is this open to the general public?
- Can anyone invite guests whenever they want to join in?
- Is this meant to just be a time of fellowship or will there be a time of study?
- Is this an evangelistic outreach or isn't it?
- Is this just for like-minded people?

Such questions are important to keep in mind because they can greatly impact how the entire group of people interact.

Recently, we discovered that we hadn't clearly defined the purpose of one of our own home fellowships, at least not to people who had joined since we initially had started. While those who had been there since the beginning had an idea of the point and purposes behind our Sabbath gatherings, we had not clearly communicated some aspects to everyone who now attends.

Don't get me wrong, this wasn't a negative thing, no problems were caused or anything of that nature, not at all. We simply became aware that some may have had the idea that we were using our gatherings as an evangelistic type outreach, at least in part. In truth, this wasn't our point and purpose; not that we are against it, it just wasn't one of the things we focused on for our own home fellowship. However, this was what some seemed to have thought, which showed us we hadn't been clear in defining the purpose to such individuals. So, we recommend having a clear purpose and communicating it to all who you invite to your gatherings.

Step 2. Planning, Expectations, and Respect

While defining the purpose does set up expectations, they don't touch on all expectations. Different social situations present different types of expectations. Even as individuals we have our own internal standards on what we expect from others, how they behave, etc. This can be even more true when inviting individuals into private homes. Remember, a home fellowship is within someone's home. Our homes are our personal spaces and it's wise to keep that in mind when planning a fellowship and inviting others to it, especially if you are not the one hosting the event.

When setting up your own home fellowship, or attending someone else's, it's wise to set up or be aware of some of the basics. Depending upon how the group functions and its intended purpose, here are a few questions you may want to consider:

- What time do we meet?
- Are we sharing a meal or snacks?
 - If so, what should I bring?

- When do we start the study portion of the fellowship?

Now here's an important one:

- What rules or behavioral expectations does the host have for guests in their homes?

In our own experience these are all important questions to keep in mind because they help set the tone and atmosphere. Some individuals, like myself, like to keep a tight schedule. If I say I will be somewhere at 2, I like to be there at least 5 minutes prior. However, that is not a realistic expectation for me to set on others, even if I'm hosting the event. It's good to set up times, but it may be wise to plan for some flexibility in that. Life happens to all of us and sometimes people run late, we need to be flexible enough to allow that. At the same time, if you're the one running late, it is respectful to let the others know.

In our own Shabbat gatherings, we have a set time for everyone to arrive. However, we typically know there will be some time of just fellowship for somewhere between 30 minutes and an hour. Sometimes we have even gone over that before we started our actual study. Flexibility is typically appreciated by all, within reason.

When we have new people coming, we make sure they are aware of the start time as well as what time we eat because we share a meal together after studying the Torah Portion. We do our gatherings potluck style, that is, everyone brings something to share. For some groups this works, others it may not. Each group needs to decide for themselves what works best. This may take some trial and error as well, so again, be flexible.

As mentioned above, one very important question to ask is what the expectations are of the family hosting the gathering. In our own group, we rotate between 5-7 different households; no two are identical. We need to be respectful of the "house rules" so to speak. For example, some people may ask that your shoes be removed before entering, while others do not. Some families may be open to have "new people" or "guests" show up, while others would prefer to have at least met everyone before they invite them into their home.

These are very important things to keep in mind. Respect for one another is so important, and when such rules are broken things can get tense or trust can be broken. If breaking the rules, or not respecting their rules becomes a pattern, we can end up pushing those people away or they may no longer want to participate. Causing division because of a lack of respect should never be something that occurs.

Remember, these people (possibly close friends) have opened up their home, their own personal, private space to you for the purpose of fellowship and maybe study. This should be a blessing and not a burden for them. Respect them and their own house rules. Be a gracious guest, be a gracious host. We are all to be one body and to love one another. Part of loving one another is respect.

Step 3. Enjoy

In truth, having a home fellowship should not be a burdensome thing, but one of joy, something to look forward to. The concept of a home fellowship is simple, it's people that complicate things. The more people, the more complicated things can get, even if it's just the logistics of it.

Chances are that not everyone in the group will be best of friends; some people will always gravitate toward one another be it because of shared interests, personalities, or even simply because of age. This should be okay; we shouldn't get our feelings hurt if one person is closer to another than they are with

us. These things do just happen; don't let jealousy or your own desires get in the way of sharing in the joy that should be present when the body gets together.

If you are having a bible study, encourage discussion and participation by everyone, but don't try to require it of others. People should share and engage as they feel comfortable.

Respect one another's thoughts and opinions, even if they differ from your own. You don't have to agree with everything a person says, but don't get into a heated argument about it either. Good healthy discussion benefits everyone, a heated argument breaks down relationships and can cause division. There are many potentially divisive topics in Scripture depending on the understanding a person has.

Remember, no one has all of the answers; no one has everything 100% correct, we all have something to learn. Scripture, like people, has great depth and new insights and revelations come from studying it together. We are one body, but are different parts as Paul states. Do not discount what another has to say for any reason; listen and test everything.

Some Pitfalls to Avoid

Like you, we are only human which means we make mistakes. Based on some of our own experiences, here are five potential pitfalls we recommend avoiding if at all possible.

Pitfall 1.) Facilitator versus Leader

Every group needs someone to help keep things organized to some degree. However, it can be very easy to have one person become the leader. Leaders are good things, when done properly, but in our experience, we have found it better to have a group of individuals instead of one authoritative figure. We have found the model from Scripture to be the best. We go over it in detail in our teaching: [The Church: His Model](#). It is the model we tend to gravitate toward even in our own home fellowship. There isn't one person who's in charge.

When it comes to "running the meeting" so-to-speak, typically the head of hosting household is the one who facilitates it for us. There is a difference between a leader and a facilitator; here's a short description for each.

A leader typically sets the tone and purpose of something and expects others to come along with them; they lead the way but they're in charge.

A facilitator helps the others to find the meaning, figure out their own understandings, and they work to get people engaged.

In our home fellowships typically the head of hosting house performs both roles to some degree, in part it's just to help minimize the rabbit trails in a bible study discussion.

This is still needed!

Many times when we haven't had someone in our group keeping us on topic, we could spend 30-45 minutes on unrelated sidebars! They were still good discussions, but not quite the Torah discussion we were trying to get through. The person helping to keep the group on task is not always the host, nor should it have to be that way.

Facilitating the discussions can help everyone get more out of the discussion than someone simply providing a bunch of answers. Sidebar discussions can be great and lead to some great insights and revelation, so we are not saying they are bad. It's just good to have a facilitator who brings the discussion back to the topics intended.

Sometimes those sidebars prevented our own group from finishing a discussion on the entire Torah Portion because we got caught up in the rabbit trails. Because one of our goals as a group is to get through the whole Torah portion, we like to avoid such things from occurring when possible.

Pitfall 2.) A Single Source of Knowledge

What we mean by not having a single source of knowledge is that we shouldn't rely on just one person to have all of the answers. It's great to have questions, and many groups likely have one or two people who are more knowledgeable than the others. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. The problem comes when everyone simply asks their questions to these individuals instead of having a group discussion.

When someone has more knowledge, it's great for them to share it!

The discussion on the question shouldn't always end up there though. It's definitely easier for us to ask a question, receive an answer, and then move on, but it doesn't necessarily provide the most benefit.

There have been times in our own fellowships where one of the teachers from 119 was there and people basically just asked all of their questions to the one person; and no one else really participated.

Yes, it's great to have someone with knowledge, but not a lot of discussion and growth for everyone else was occurring. In a way, it can easily become a one-man show and we can put that person on a pedestal of sorts. That wasn't the purpose of our fellowship.

Because we noticed this tendency, others in the group have worked hard to take a more participatory role. The teacher still answers questions, but now there is typically more discussions, thoughts and ideas brought up. We are able to go deeper when we don't rely on just one person's thoughts.

We are all on this journey and are all accountable for what we know, not what someone else tells us. We need to study and test everything for ourselves.

Pitfall 3.) Bringing A Personal Agenda Into the Group

We all have our own lives and things we want to accomplish. Many of us have some sort of "baggage" that we carry with us wherever we go whether it be interpersonal issues with others in the group, past experiences that shape how we see things, or any number of other influencers. All of these things can affect the group dynamics as well as how discussions go.

We need to be careful not to allow such things to become hindrances to the group and the discussions. Sometimes people come in with a personal agenda. It may be something as simple as wanting to prove themselves an equal to someone else, or maybe they want to show they are more knowledgeable than another individual, or they want to force their own understandings upon the group. None of these things are beneficial to anyone, not even themselves.

If you have differences in thoughts and understandings, it's great to discuss them; but don't try to "convert" someone or bully them into taking your side. We are one body, but we all have our own individual walks and relationships. It's okay if not everyone agrees with you, if you have the truth then perhaps a discussion will help reveal it to them with the help of the Father. At the same time, what you have may not be "the truth", but it's your current understanding.

A good discussion may help to show you something you didn't know or realize before. If part of the purpose of your home fellowship is to study Scripture together, then we need to go into it with our hearts and minds open to what the Father may want to show us. Many of us in this walk may have once had beliefs we were certain would never change (such as that the Law of God no longer applying to us), yet today, after study and revelation from the Father, we have found a different perspective.

If we aren't open to what the Father may show us through discussions with another individual, then we are missing out; and depending on how we interact with others, we may be preventing them from seeing the truth. The Father is the author and finisher of our faith, it's not us and we shouldn't try to be such for others. Be open to testing everything, even your own beliefs and understandings. We would recommend not "thumping" someone over the head with the bible to get them to agree with you. You could be doing more harm than good.

Pitfall 4.) Handling Disagreements

At one time or another, most of us have been in a discussion with an individual that escalated beyond where it should have. We're all human and we all make mistakes and most of us get offended at one point or another. When these things happen, we are to be quick to forgive and slow to anger. If someone offends you, or wrongs you in some way, Scripture tells us to go to that person and discuss it with them. We have found this to be the best method of handling things in our group. Just as when a brother is in sin we are commanded to go to them about it, the same is true when we have disagreements amongst ourselves. The biblical model can be found in Matthew 18:15-17.

Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Again, we are to go to our brothers when there is an issue; it doesn't have to be just if it's a sin. We need to work out disagreements and hurts with the people involved; that is the only way things can truly be resolved.

Going to others with the problem, and the involved party, rarely solves the problem and often can create another one as we'll discuss in the next section.

For more on handling being offended, we recommend our teaching titled [It Was A Matter of Self-Offense](#).

When we allow a disagreement to grow into feelings of contention we risk fracturing the body. There is already too much divisiveness in what should be the one unified body of Messiah.

Disagreeing with someone's spelling or pronunciation of "the name", which calendar is 100% perfect, or how someone worships (whether they sing, dance, etc. or not) doesn't lead anyone to salvation and the truth of the Word.

Personal differences and understandings will happen, we are all on a journey. Don't let such things fracture your home fellowship unnecessarily. If you do end up splitting, we highly recommend not maintaining an "us vs them" mentality. For more on the subject of unity, please see our teaching titled [Echad: The Necessity of Unity](#). We also strongly recommend studying Ephesians chapter 4 as a reminder about how we are to be and act as children of YHWH.

Pitfall 5.) Gossip and Slander

It's unfortunate that this needs to be listed, but the reality is, we are human and gossip happens, especially if there are interpersonal problems happening between people in the group. Remember, in Step 3 we discussed earlier about enjoying your gatherings?

Gossip and talking poorly about others behind their backs (or even if they're around) is one sure way to kill the joy of people in the group. Such things bring about division, hurt feelings, and can demonstrate a lack of love for our neighbors. This really goes back to Pitfall number 4 about handling disagreements. If you are having an issue with someone, then you need to go to that person about it, not others in the group.

There is a difference between venting or discussing a situation seeking advice of elders (*those you trust that are upright before God, and will point you back to Scripture whenever possible*) as you're working to get through it or figure out how to resolve it, and simply talking about someone and problems you're having with them.

Remember how we are to treat our brethren.

Leviticus 19:11-18 (ESV)

"You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD (YHWH).

"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD (YHWH).

"You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD (YHWH).

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (YHWH).

And also Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:29-32 (ESV)

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger

and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

As a final reminder on this topic, let's reread Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10:23-25 (ESV)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

What We Do or Have Done

Through the years, members of our staff have been involved in different home fellowship groups, no two are ever alike. There are aspects that are beneficial in each of them, as well as things that were not as beneficial. We are by no means experts or have everything figured out. We would like to share some of what we have experienced in case it may be of benefit to you.

Food

Many home fellowships involve food in some way whether it be snacks or sharing a meal. Groups we have participated in typically prefer the potluck method where everyone brings something to share as this helps to defray costs of such gatherings and it brings variety as everyone has different things they do well.

It's personally one of my favorite things about home fellowship, I like to eat and try new things! For whatever reason, it seems YHWH's people are excellent cooks!

In the past we have eaten meals before our bible discussion, and that worked well. We have also, and currently do, share our meal after the discussion. Sometimes we also have snacks before, during, or after, especially if there are kids in the group! Each group needs to figure out what works best for them and go with that. There is no set formula or specific foods or drinks that must be served at each meal.

One thing that our groups have done to help with organizing these shared meals, is to create a private or secret group on Facebook. The ladies largely use this group to announce to everyone where the fellowship is meeting that week as well as what they are bringing. This can help them better coordinate the meals so that everyone doesn't bring a dessert (*not that I'd complain if they did*).

We also use the Facebook group to let others know when they won't be attending, prayer requests, or to post interesting articles or insights from the previous Torah Portion. You can use it however you like, we have found it to be a valuable tool to help keep us connected and organized.

Torah Study and Discussion

The primary purpose in our home fellowships on Shabbat is to discuss the weekly Torah Portion and any other Scriptures we want to. The primary focus, though, is discussing the Torah Portion. Members of our current group have done this a variety of ways in the past.

At one point we used to read the entire Torah Portion aloud, popcorn style. This means that we would take turns reading aloud a chapter, or a section. Then another person would volunteer and read another

section. There were no set bible translations that had to be used; it also helped those who had not had a chance to read or listen to it that week. One of the biggest benefits of this method was having the various translations being used by different people. Sometimes what may be confusing in one translation is made clear in another; in that way reading aloud like that brought some great insight for individuals and allowed them to grow.

There were multiple occasions where after reading and studying on my own prior to qahal

Qahal, Strong's H6950/6951 קהל

to be gathered, be assembled, assembly, community, often of Israel assembled for religious ceremony. (Kohlenberger/Mounce Hebrew Dictionary)

I would listen to someone read a verse in a different translation and I would see it in a new light or gain a new understanding. On the other hand, reading the entire Torah Portion out loud can be quite time consuming, especially on the weeks where it's very long. So you will need to decide if this is something you wish to do or not. Once the reading was completed, we would go back through the Torah Portion chapter by chapter and ask questions or discuss it.

Another thing a group I used to go to did was split up the men and women for a period of time. We could first come together and open in prayer, but then the men would go upstairs and the women would remain downstairs. In this scenario, we were to already have read the Torah Portion individually and we would simply take this time to discuss any questions or comments we had. One of the big advantages to doing this split was that not everyone is comfortable asking questions or speaking in a large group.

There can be great value in small groups, it can foster a more intimate environment and allow for there to be mentorship on a greater level than can be achieved with everyone together. I can only speak from my own experience, but with the men, sometimes there were subjects that some of the guys would not want to bring up in mixed company. Splitting up allowed them to be more open about topics whether they be of a sexual nature, or even just questions about how to be a better father or spiritual leader in their home. In this way, splitting up was a great benefit. Another example of this benefit was my own daughter, who was between 11 and 13 at the time. She enjoyed the time split apart because she could ask questions, or hear discussions about topics she wouldn't necessarily hear in mixed company.

After both the men and the women finished their separate discussions, we would all come back together and discuss any unresolved questions or to share some great insights and discussion points that we had when we were separated.

The down side to this method, is that sometimes great points would be forgotten when we came back together. Sometimes there wasn't as much discussion about things both genders would benefit from and not even realize it because men and women are different and see things differently. So there are trade-offs; again each group needs to decide what is best for themselves.

Currently, our group does not read the Torah Portion aloud, but we come together with an expectation that everyone has already read it. We do this to use the time once taken up by reading out loud to be used for our discussion and questions. We go through the entire Torah Portion chapter by chapter allowing good discussion from each section. This isn't perfect either, of course, as not everyone has read everything beforehand.

The group can be a bit large, too large, so that not everyone wants to ask their questions in front of such a large number of people; like those who have a bit of a stage fright. With that many people, it can also be quite easy to get caught on a bunch of rabbit trails and it's harder to get back to the Torah Portion itself. Also, since we eat after our discussion; if the discussion is going long that day, sometimes some of the women get up to heat their food up or put it all out so that it's accessible once it's time to eat. When this happens, they may miss out on some of the discussion.

Children

As with many home fellowship groups, we have a number of children of varying age. We, as parents, are instructed to teach our children the Torah and at times we have worked to include the children in our discussions. At one point when we had more small children and we were reading the portion out loud, we would have all of the small children sit quietly on the floor between us. Some would color, others would draw, or maybe play with a toy. This way they were hearing the Word and learning to be quiet and calm while others were speaking and the Word of God was being read.

Once we were finished praying and reading out loud, we would ask if any of the youth had questions. There were some families who would require their older kids to ask questions, and this would be the time they would ask them. Once all of the youths' questions were answered, they would be released to go do other things and then the "adult" discussion would begin.

Remember the house rules we discussed earlier? Well, here is a place where that would come into play. At some houses the kids would be required to sit while the Torah Portion was read, while at others they were permitted to play outside. It all depended upon the host's preference based upon their situation and what was worked out with the parents.

Today, since we do not read the Torah Portion out loud, we do not typically require the little ones to sit quietly, but allow them to go out and play. There are still families that require their older kids to remain with the adults and participate in the discussion. Again, every fellowship is different and you need to work out what works best for you.

There are not any hard rules that must be followed, nor any one specific thing that will make your home fellowship grow. Ultimately, what you need is a love for YHWH, love for your neighbor, an open heart with an open mind, and a desire to continue to grow.

If you are planning to start a home fellowship, or to join an existing one, there are a few things to consider and figure out.

- You need to know the purpose of the group (what are your, or they working toward or looking to accomplish from the fellowship)
- How do you want the group to function or how does it function (logistics such as time and place, food or not, etc., and social expectations)
- Does it bring joy and edification of the body and the Creator, or is it a stress and something you dread doing and attending?

From our own experiences, there are also five primary pitfalls that you should try to avoid. If you can't avoid them, then it's important to know how to handle them when they come up.

These pitfalls are:

- Having a group leader versus a facilitator

- Having a single source of knowledge
- Bringing a personal agenda to the group and striving to force it on them
- Mishandling disagreements
- Do your best to prevent gossip and slander from occurring.

These are 5 important areas that need to be monitored closely within your group whether you're helping facilitate it or if you're simply attending. If you start to see such issues occurring, make sure you bring it up to the group and try to stop them before they take hold and potentially tear the group apart.

In the end, your home fellowship will be what you make it. Strive to keep YHWH at the center, hold fast to Scripture, and test everything to it. That is really all that any of us can do.

Again, we are not experts but we have shared some of what we have learned through our own experiences. We pray that we have provided some value to you if you are seeking or participating in a home fellowship group.

We hope that this message has blessed you.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom.

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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