

LARGE GROUP

Session 1

Grow Together

Our Story

In the fall of 1983, seven families met to consider a very important question: “Is there a need in the Northwest Arkansas area for a new church with a distinct emphasis and approach to ministry?” After much discussion and prayer, the families came together and voted unanimously to plant a church that would become Fellowship Bible Church of Northwest Arkansas. In February of 1984, the church hired Dr. Robert Cupp as its first pastor. When Fellowship officially opened to the public on Sunday, May 27, 1984, the core of the church had grown to seventeen families meeting each week in the facilities of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Bentonville. Fellowship was engaged in ministry throughout the week in small groups that met in home and in corporate worship on Sunday mornings. The church continued to grow throughout the 1980’s and into the 1990’s. On June 16, 1991, Fellowship met for the first time in the newly constructed building on Pleasant Grove Road in Rogers. Today, the Lord has allowed Fellowship to add two additional campuses (Fayetteville in 2016 and Bentonville in 2022) with multiple congregations and ministries.

Fellowship has experienced the blessing of God and enjoyed remarkable growth since its inception in 1983. It is our heart's desire to continue down the path established by those first families of Fellowship to fulfill God's purpose for our lives and to make a difference for Christ in Northwest Arkansas and the world.

Today Fellowship is a multi-congregational church, led by our Elders, managed by our staff, and always people driven. Our congregations all share common resources, one doctrinal statement, and have identical core values.

Our Ultimate Objective is to glorify God.

Our Mission is to produce and release spiritual leaders who know and express the authentic Christ to Northwest Arkansas and the world.

Our Vision is to change the heart and soul of Northwest Arkansas and the world.

For more information on the role of our elders and staff see Appendix A: Our Leadership.

Our Philosophy

At Fellowship, our philosophy of ministry is built on four foundational principles:

Priesthood of the Believer

Peter wrote that we “are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9 NIV). This means that as followers of Jesus we are called to be His hands and feet in this world. We are His ambassadors in our homes, church, neighborhoods offices, communities, and the world (2 Corinthians 5:20). Fellowship is not a staff-driven ministry. Our staff exists to equip our leaders to do ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).

A few important implications of this belief in the priesthood of every believer are:

- *Every member ministry - we expect all of our people to engage in ministry, including you!*
- *Our staff is an equipping staff. We are here to prepare God’s people for ministry.*
- *We are not personality driven. We are a ministry team. Jesus gets the glory and we all get our hands dirty.*
- *The influence of Christ is multiplied. Releasing more leaders means extending the touch of Christ to more people in more places.*

Form and Function

Our philosophy of ministry calls for us to distinguish between ministry functions and ministry forms. A ministry function is a Biblical responsibility assigned to the church by the Lord. Ultimately there are six functions the Lord calls the church to fulfill.

Functions of the Church:

- *Exalting (Worship)*
- *Evangelizing (Outreach)*
- *Establishing (Discipleship)*
- *Equipping (Training)*
- *Encouraging (Fellowship)*
- *Empowering (Service)*

These are non-negotiable and to ignore or fail in any one of these is to fall short of the mission the church has been called to fulfill. The way in which we accomplish these functions will vary over time and circumstances.

The ministry form is the manner in which the function is accomplished.

When Fellowship began, we asked this question: “What is the best way (form) to accomplish the functions of the church?” We were not bound by tradition or history. We created the ministry from scratch. This is still a value today. Our ministry teams are regularly at the drawing board trying to figure out the best way to fulfill our Biblical mandates as a church.

The following chart may help in understanding the difference:

FUNCTION	FORM
Timeless	Timely
Static	Flexible
Unchanging	Changeable
Non-Negotiable	Negotiable
Mission	Method

A few implications emerge from this principle:

- *Our forms of ministry may be different from your background. Departure from traditional form does not mean departure from Biblical standards.*
- *Forms are not necessarily right or wrong. Biblical functions can be accomplished effectively in many different ways. There may not be one “right” way to do it but many different ways to fulfill a Biblical mandate.*
- *Since our forms are negotiable, the Fellowship body of believers should EXPECT CHANGE. We want to maintain a creative spirit that is constantly looking to fulfill out Biblical functions in culturally relevant ways.*

Essential elements of ministry: Truth, Accountability, and Relationships

In each aspect of our ministry at Fellowship, we look for three essential elements to be present. Without these three ingredients, the ministry risks losing its effectiveness and Biblical fidelity. The three elements are:

- **Truth**—*Christian ministry is based on the Scriptures. Biblical truth is essential for any ministry to communicate Christ (John 8:32).*
- **Accountability**—*Christian ministry challenges us to faithfulness and reliability. It urges us to live a life worthy of Christ (Proverbs 27:17).*
- **Relationships**—*Christian ministry calls us to love one another (1 Thessalonians 2:8).*

What would the church be like without one of these key elements? Let's do some math:

Truth + Relationships – Accountability = Country Club Church

Truth + Accountability – Relationships = Legalistic Church

Accountability + Relationships – Truth = Cult

In addition to truth, accountability, and relationships, Fellowship has four other core values:

Gospel

Jesus Christ is central to everything we do.

Generosity

We live selflessly through stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.

Life-Change

We celebrate the transforming power of Christ.

Team

We serve effectively and efficiently through collaboration and cooperation with others.

These core values guide our ministry teams as we pursue Christ together.

Decentralized Ministry

Fellowship's ministry is not centered on our campuses. God has provided beautiful facilities that we utilize for our corporate worship services and large group trainings, but most of our ministry is done away from our campuses. Homes, restaurants, break rooms, gyms, office buildings, playgrounds, parks, coffee shops, and many other places become our ministry locations on a regular basis. We gather on the weekends to worship and be refreshed by the Lord, and then we head out into our mission field to live out our faith. Most of our adult, student, and other small groups meet off campus each week. We have always said a non-believer is much more likely to come to a home than to a church. You could say this philosophy is rooted in being an incarnational church instead of an attractional church. We are not centered on weekly events designed to draw or attract people to the church campus. Our desire is to equip the people of Fellowship to be the very presence of Christ wherever they find themselves in Northwest Arkansas. Practically speaking, we gather together on the church campuses once a week to grow and worship God together. We are then commissioned to embody Christ in our communities throughout the week.

Centralized Ministry (Attractional) - Key question: What can we do/offer to get people to come to our church?

Decentralized Ministry (Incarnational) - Key question: What can we do to enable people to live out their faith in their homes and communities?

Our story and our philosophy of ministry come together to create the culture of Fellowship Bible Church of NWA. Within this framework you will find different expressions of these same values at our various congregations. This ministry model allows us to be unified in the essentials, to feel freedom in the non-essentials, and in all things to reflect to love and charity of Christ. If the Lord leads you to join Fellowship, our prayer is that you will find a place where you can minister in your gifting and play your part in glorifying God where you live, work, and play.