



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

## ***Resourcing for Prayer Network***

# **Practical Help (4) The Tie That Binds**

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*We hope that this analysis of the Biblical requirements for communities will be helpful to you in your groups*

**April 2015**

**Every community worker is aware that although many groups are formed with the best intentions they stand a better chance of success in community terms if they have a clear purpose shared by all members.**

### **Sharing Vision**

One of the defining factors of a successful group is a sense of belonging and having a common purpose. A shared raison d'être needs to be clear when a group is being established. Is there a clear purpose for the group and how do we identify this in sharing it with others? Does the group have a clear vision shared by all?

### **Different Kinds of Community**

For some community groups the choice of whether we belong or not is not available. An ethnic group is based on race and place of birth and it is this forced bond which unifies people and provides a starting point for activity. It can be an encouragement to have links with others who are like us. Families have been very strong in the past with extended families as the backbone of more neighbourhood communities. But living in an area, large or small, gives a common identity to a group of people.

For example Liverpoolians have a strong identity but this is not like race or colour because others could move into the area and adopt the culture. There are degrees of patriotism (another form of community) which can develop and in times of conflict this can play an essential part in unifying everybody. But uniting against a common enemy must be exercised carefully. Interest groups such as football supporters, surfers, ramblers and even commuters can come from many groups. Most people are unaware of the large number of groups to which they belong - or even that they can be a member of more than one group.

### **Marks of a Community**

Clothing, culture and language are all different ways of communicating and can become identification marks for a community - and can help with access into, or the erection of barriers excluding people. Language is a powerful means of identifying community. It can be just an accent, or the use, or non-use of

words. Christians have words which mean different things and even a special language they use, especially in prayer. The use or misuse of certain expressions can exclude you, or challenge you to change in order to be accepted. The use of the word 'conversion' to encourage people to change from electricity to gas 25 years ago caused quite a stir!

## Christian Community

But just having similarities does not make a group a community which is created with a common bond. So what is it that binds Christians together which goes beyond ethnicity, place of birth or nationality and embraces those from many different backgrounds? Christians can feel at one with each other with a common bond in all parts of the world. Paul set the parameters for this in his letters asserting the unifying nature of Christianity across the divisions of those Early Church days. *'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'* (Galatians 3:28).

*'Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all'* (Colossians 3:11).

The Common bond is Jesus, a willingness to know him, to follow him with a dependence on his love for us. John Fawcett a Baptist minister in the 18th century when he was having to make some far-reaching decisions wrote the hymn "**Blest be the tie that binds**" - the words are still sung today and give a reassurance to many of the depth of these bonds. He took literally Paul's words to the Philippians: *'If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in [the] Spirit, intent on one purpose.'* - See more at: <http://mereorthodoxy.com/reading-the-hymns-blest-be-the-tie-that-binds/#sthash.K2BEbdq2.dpu>

More recently Bob Gillman's song from the 1970s emphasises the love element: "**Bind us together, Lord, bind us together; with cords that cannot be broken**".

## Communities within Communities

However Christian small groups develop, this deep root in Christ and in the larger community with a sharing of common values should always be recognised. It was this that bound the Early Church together - when people felt at one and trusted those who believed as they did. The relics from the catacombs strengthened this link with the martyrs - together even in death.

Within the wider church structure there are always smaller groups where people can exercise their specific gifts to the glory of God - the flower arrangers in church, the bell ringers, the singers and artists, as well as the counsellors and those reaching out through Street Pastors or Food Banks - all have their part to play - and so do the Prayer Groups and those who want to delve more deeply into the Bible. The current need is for more of the prayer groups, study groups and prophetic hubs to understand what God is saying to us in our diverse world. May small groups grow and be used wisely. They are an essential part of the world-wide community of Christians.

*This paper come to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in April 2015  
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