



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 (5)**

# **Focusing on Depth and Excellence**

## **Primary Functions of a Small Group**

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*The importance of ensuring that there is a vision for your small group.*

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**A small group has a different *raison d'etre* from that of a small church: although it is well known that many small groups have developed over time into churches and many churches have declined until they are little more than a small group. But on the whole small groups should never try to emulate a church - both are needed: all churches should have small groups and all members of small groups should also be members of the wider church.**

### **The Composition of a Church and/or a Group**

Churches are invariably composed of a number of small groups distinguished by age as in Sunday Schools or groups for Youth or Senior Citizens, or by skills and giftings as in choirs, flower arranging groups, drama groups or building maintenance teams; or to fulfil activities such as visiting and outreach. The Early Church recognised the need for people to operate within their gifting (*Ephesians 4*) and the need to provide a special support for the Hellenist widows (*Acts 6*).

It is unusual these days for any church to try to function without a number of these groups helping it fulfil its mission although it is only in more recent years that their value as an intrinsic building block of the church has been fully recognised. Parachurch organisations sprang up to be an aid to the church, by taking one particular aspect of mission and providing more specialist knowledge, expertise and time to develop this more deeply. They were not seen as churches in themselves but as a necessary support mechanism for Christians everywhere - and so their value continues.

#### **THE MANY DIMENSIONAL CHURCH**

**The church as the world-wide network of believers**, gives the outward face to the non-Christian world of a common belief in Our Lord Jesus Christ crossing all racial, language, gender and generational differences even if there are many differences in operation; this understanding of church needs to cover many facets.

**The church as a denomination** preserves and perpetuates the doctrine of the forefathers and supports local community expressions in various ways.

**The church as a local Body of Believers** shows the worshipping and/or caring face to the neighbourhood or to a gathered assembly and along with other churches in the area is able to meet the needs of the people.

## The Value of Being in a Group

But the small group, whether it is linked to a specific church or not, is able to operate with a degree of freedom and is able to develop much deeper thinking and maturity in particular aspects of the Christian life. If there are no direct links to others, it also has the freedom to cut across barriers in its composition and can respond to specific needs and benefit from wider experience. There will always be the link with Jesus that binds us together and while few are set up as purely fellowship groups all need to be able to identify and develop a common purpose.

## What Kind of Group?

In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the number of prayer groups around the country. Prayer has many dimensions including praise and worship, confession and forgiveness, thanksgiving, petition and intercession. Most of these new groups are intercessory prayer groups and while including some of all the above aspects of prayer they will have their main objective in lifting up the needs of others. They can be further defined as praying for the nation, for Parliament, for Israel, or for specific towns, or events or groups of people. But there are also prayer groups for healing, and many are set up as Bible study groups whether thematic or as teaching sessions - these should be more than academic knowledge but have an outcome in changing lives. Others are set up to listen to God, or as prophetic hubs to understand what God is saying to his people and how they should act.

Recent research and experience has shown that meeting in a home situation enables these relationships to deepen and eating and drinking together can break the ice and can help weld people together as a supportive group for each other and for action.

Small groups should always be open to newcomers who share the same vision but if the numbers rise above 15 - 20 either a further group should be planted or the structures changed to accommodate additional people.

## Action needed!

- Does your small group have a definite focus?
- Are its members committed to a shared vision?
- Are you willing to explore the purpose of your group in greater depth? (eg Prayer for Israel could lead to exploring links with groups in Israel who study the Gospels from an Hebraic Background or to become a collection centre for practical help to those working there)
- Are you willing to receive help from others in the way of resources? Let us know if we can help further.

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