



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*

# SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES (14)

## The Gift of The Evangelist

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**Ephesians 4:11 (NIV)**

*'So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, **the evangelists**, the pastors and teachers'*

**The gift of the evangelist to the body of Christ helps us to look outwards rather than inwards - to help non-believers and the unsaved take the first step to salvation. This gift is God's way of using us to extend the frontiers of the kingdom and it opens the gospel to everyone.**

### **Why Evangelise?**

We know that the Gospel is not just for ourselves or for a select few by reason of birth, because it has a proselytising message which few other religions have. It builds upon the understanding of the Jews who also had many non-Jewish followers who trusted in their God but they did not, or could not, become Jews and so could not claim the full promises.

The Great Commission to *'go and make disciples of all nations'* (Matthew 28.19-20) is still the mandate for all believers. The strategy for its fulfilment was given in Acts 1.8; and the power to do so was given at Pentecost. J B Phillips describes the evangelist as one who preaches the Gospel. But essentially the role of the evangelist was also to equip and activate the church to evangelise and to enable believers to share their faith corporately and individually.

### **Model Evangelists**

Although Christian tradition often refers to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the 'Four Evangelists', perhaps because they wrote the Gospel accounts, biblically the model role of an evangelist was set for us by Philip who actively shared his faith wherever he went. This has been an effective strategy for the spreading of the Gospel down the ages.

Philip was a Gentile 'Deacon' one of "the Seven" (Acts 6.1) chosen to administer daily charity to the poor widows and is not to be confused with Philip who was one of Jesus' disciples.

When Stephen was martyred Philip took literally the strategy given by Jesus and he went to Samaria. Until then the church had been avoiding Samaria, the northern home of the tribe of Israel whose leaders had been taken to Assyria in the 8th century BC and replaced by exiles from other parts of the world. They had inter-married with the newcomers and were no longer considered pure Jews.

It is interesting that they responded to the good news from Philip and were baptised, repenting of their sins (even Simon Magus was one of his converts), but it needed Peter and John's visit to verify what was happening which then brought them into the same experience as that of the Jewish church. The next we hear of Philip is that he is sharing the good news with the Ethiopian eunuch, a member of another neglected and despised group. He was also baptised and took the message even farther afield. Philip himself was like a modern missionary crossing cultural barriers!!

Some years later when he had settled in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9), Philip entertained Paul and his companion on their way to Jerusalem. He *'had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied'* - the whole family were involved in ministry!

It is interesting that the Eastern strand of the church - the Coptic Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Syriac Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodoxy venerate and give greater attention to Philip than the Western churches. We should honour him as the first itinerant evangelist.

## Team Work

We need to note that the evangelist has a great concern for the lost and brings people to Christ - but he or she does not convert them - Jesus does this and he chooses his disciples (John 15.16). So evangelists need to be clear exponents of the gospel - understanding people's needs and what will be attractive to them. They should also be working in a team so that others can take on the responsibility of nurturing the new believers in the faith and building on that initial experience.

## Sharing Faith

Not everyone can be effective as evangelists - but every believer can share their faith (however elementary it is) and they should all understand its importance. More people come to Christ through friendship than in any other way. And we can all learn from new believers and rejoice with them in their fresh testimonies and recapture some of the enthusiasm of first love. New believers are also often the best evangelists! They still have many non-believing friends - and can communicate their own new found excitement!

## Role in Small Groups

Many small groups are set up primarily to deepen the faith of believers but they can also be very effective by reaching out to others. All groups should be outward-looking - and ideally the composition of the groups should be open to change - so that they can embrace new insights. But small groups can get stuck on elementary things and never grow to maturity. But more-often-than-not the new believers with their fresh understanding relevant for this age, can challenge the more mature believers in their journey too.

## Lessons from History

In early Methodism it was in small groups that new believers accepted the Lord - not at the great rallies where the Gospel was preached - but in one-to-one relationships with someone who had a living faith. The new believers then came with their friends to share their new beliefs with the whole body of Christ when they gathered together as the wider assembly and they were baptised as an open confirmation of their faith. The great crusades were developed during the 18th and 19th centuries and for a while this was felt to be the main way in which new believers outside the family were born - but research shows that Friendship Evangelism and prayer are even more effective.

During the latter part of the 20th century, the Chinese underground church flourished when large groups were banned and leaders persecuted so small groups grew and multiplied by starting new ones. These principles of expansion continue to operate now that being a Christian is easier. The Daily Telegraph at Easter this year reported that the number of Christians in Communist China is growing so rapidly that by 2030 it could have more churchgoers than America (19 Apr 2014). They are also being very effective at reaching their 'ends of the earth' in America and Europe.

## Sharing the Task

Paul's charge to Timothy with instructions on how to live when so many are turning away from the truth is particularly relevant for us today. *'But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.'* (2 Timothy 4.5 NIV)

Learning how to share your faith with others can ONLY be done in small groups and we should not be intimidated by the challenge. There are many courses to follow (just search the internet!) but the best way is to talk naturally about your faith with each other so that you can answer the most awkward questions that might be thrown at you and also know clearly what you believe. But also take note of the unavoidable fact that by being a Christian you are automatically an 'Ambassador for Christ'. Among your friends and acquaintances you are his representative. So, in this sense we are all evangelists.

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