



# FOCUS ON FAITH

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## COMMUNITY

Much is talked about 'community' these days. We use phrases such as 'community spirit' or 'community values' but what does it mean to be part of a 'community'?

In its simplistic form a 'community' is any group of people. That group could be a neighbourhood or centre of population, say a city, a district, a town, a village or hamlet, or alternatively a commune or even a family group. We also use the term 'community' to describe society as a whole but for me the whole essence of 'community' is that there has to be some common ground that draws individuals together and unites them.

But that's the rub. Every community is built up entirely from individuals and as we're all totally unique, even if we have similar standpoints and views in many cases, is it possible for us to ever be totally united?

All through history we've seen that people have an unfortunate tendency to disagree and fall out with each other. Minor disagreements lead to a loss of relationship – how many parents or teachers have heard the wail of a child saying, "I'm not going to be Tracey's friend anymore," when a difficulty occurs. Thankfully often the spat is patched up the next day, when tempers and disappointments have been forgotten.

But as adults it seems to me that relationships are not so easily restored. We find that the differences we have with other people can not only cause break-ups but also break-downs. For instance, break-downs in terms a marriage or health as someone finds the stress and tension of a dispute too much to handle physically or mentally. Ultimately, our disagreements with other people can lead to much more serious consequences – physical assault, murder and war.

Of course the achievement of one person's aspirations and ambitions may mean someone else's goals and objectives may be thwarted in some way. I've seen it happen in business situations where say, two senior managers are vying for the top job. Often the one who is successful finds a way to ensure his or her rival is subsequently sidelined or even ousted. Or perhaps the unsuccessful candidate moves quickly to a rival organisation in order to gain revenge by trying to outperform their adversary.

So where does faith figure in all of this? The Message Version of the Bible has this to say about the way we approach life. ***"Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if***

***one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.***" – Galatians 5: 25-26

Yes each of us is an original; we are unique – in physical appearance, in temperament, in character. We each have different understandings and views based on a whole host of experiences and circumstances. Our attitudes and motives are not exactly alike and neither are our gifts, talents and abilities.

But that gives us a fantastic opportunity. If we harness the power of each individual's contribution we can – together – make a community so much stronger.

Those who can remember the Second World War talk about how everyone pulled together, cared for each other and sacrificed on behalf of their friends, families and neighbours. One psychologist has observed that whilst back-to-back and tenement buildings were often unsuitable accommodation for many, the increase of detached housing since the 1950's has led to a loss of the kind of community involvement that previous generations enjoyed. It was interesting to me that in a recent radio interview, one resident of a former mining village commented that the Bill banning smoking in pubs would mean his community would die because people would drink and smoke at home.

People need people – none of us is an island and unless we become hermits, it's inevitable that we have to form relationships. The question is, *"How can we work out its implications in every detail of our lives?"*

The answer, I believe is also found in the Bible. Jesus told us, we need to love God and love other people as much as we love ourselves. At times love hurts – it involves vulnerability because often we have to give up our independence in favour of someone else. On occasions it involves incredible sacrifice which with it brings pain.

If we can determine to respect, love and support others; if we can begin to appreciate the good in others rather than concentrate on the negatives so much; if we can try and understand more where other people are coming from rather than always insisting on our rights, I'm positive we will see a step-change in the way our community grows.

It starts with each one of us – are you up for the challenge?

If you are interested in finding out more about God's purposes for your life, log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk) which provides information on local Churches together with contact details, plus other Christian resources and activities.