

## Treasure in Clay Jars

### Lesson Ten: Missional Authority

#### Outcome Objectives:

1. Learners will use scripture and theological reflection to explore the nature of authority and leadership in Christ's church.
2. Learners will recognize how missional leaders form missional community, focus on missional vocation, and foster missional practices.
3. Learners will recognize that authority beneath the reign of God is invested in a variety of leaders, rather than offices, and is given for the sake of cultivating the Christ-life in the church.

#### Introduction

1. Invite the group to discuss their understandings of the following phrases:
  - "Respect for the *office* of the president."
  - "Reporting a matter to the authorities."
  - "Developing the leader within you."
2. What do these phrases tell us about the understanding of authority and leadership in our dominant culture?
3. When we speak of leaders "in the church" to whom are we generally referring? (i.e. elders, deacons, ministers, ministry leaders). What qualifies these people to be leaders? Possible answers might include: training, credentials, experience, character, passion, wisdom, title, function, role. Indicate to the group that we have a variety of ways of recognizing authority and leaders. (You might also note that some of these ways seem more valid or carry more weight than others).

#### Exploration

1. Explore the source of authority within the church by reviewing the following Scriptures:
  - **Exodus 18.** Note that Jethro does not consider Moses to be the sole source of authority. He advises Moses to share his authority with other leaders. God is the ultimate source of authority and a multiplicity of leaders does not threaten that authority.
  - **1 Samuel 8:4-21.** What assumptions about authority and leadership do you observe among the Israelites? God affirms to Samuel that the people did not reject his leadership and a prophet, but that they rejected God's authority. Later God chooses the kings of Israel – Saul, David, Solomon. The "succession of authority in Israel follows God's will, not family lineage.
  - **Matthew 28:18** – Notice that part of the Great Commission is the affirmation that God has granted Jesus all authority. Jesus gives authority over evil to his disciples (i.e. Matt. 10:1). Since all authority comes from God, leaders in the body of Christ are not to

take advantage of this authority and dominate the flock (Luke 22:25-26).

2. Affirm that missional leaders are those who derive their authority from God. God has called them to lead in a particular way and for particular purposes. One of these purposes is to ***form missional community***.
  - **Read 1 Cor. 12:4-31.**
  - What is the common source of the various gifts? (Holy Spirit, 12:11)
  - What is the common objective of the various gifts? (The common good, serving one another for the sake of mission, 12:7)
  - What are the different leadership roles mentioned in this text?
  - Recognize that those entrusted with these various gifts are to work together just as a body with different parts works together. What does this tell us about the nature of our community?
  - **Read Eph 4:11-16.**
  - What are the different leadership roles mentioned in this text (4:11)? Who appoints these leaders?
  - What is the hierarchy of these roles? (This is of course a trick question since there is no evidence that one role is superior to another).
  - What is the common purpose of these various leaders? (4:12-13).
  - Have the group list the words that demonstrate how leaders form missional community: “built up,” “unity in the faith,” “mature,” “the fullness of Christ.”
  
3. Explore another particular purpose of missional leaders regarding the common objective of missional leaders: to ***focus on missional vocation (calling)***.
  - **Read 2 Cor. 5:11-21.**
  - What is Paul’s focus? Does he seem to have a clear understanding of his ministry and calling?(5:20-21)
  - What expectations do we sometimes place on leaders that seem good but actually distract them from “leading” us to focus on the missional vocation of the church?
  - How might our leaders hold us accountable to the vocation to which God has called this congregation? How might we support the leaders so that they keep us focused? (Adapt these questions if your group includes leaders).
  
4. Affirm that another purpose of missional leaders is to ***foster missional practices***.
  - **Read Phil 3:12-17.**
  - Notice that Paul has a clear focus and vocation in mind (3:12-14).

- Notice that Paul is willing to make an example of not only himself, but also others who are mature and others who follow the pattern of the gospel life. (3:17)
- **Read 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1.**
- Ask your group to name the sort of practices Paul's attitude would foster?
- How would this sort of leadership lead the church through conflict?
- How would it keep us focused on God's mission?
- Paul seems to be interested in discipleship and spiritual formation rather than simple information. Discuss the people in your congregation that you follow because you see the example of Christ in their lives. How will you follow the pattern of that person's life?

**Response:**

1. Discuss ways that your congregation can affirm the leaders that God has given you. What are some simple ways that you can show your appreciation and more importantly your "follow-ship?"
2. How will you identify those who have been gifts to lead the congregation into being more faithful to God's mission? Are there members of your group/class that ought to be recognized? How was this done in Acts 6? Stephen and Phillip are among the seven recognized as leaders in Acts 6. What activities and practices are they engaged in following the text of Acts 6? Are they serving at tables? Are they involved in the mission of God?