

## **MISSIONAL CHURCH: Treasure in Clay Jars**

### *Lesson Two: Finding Our Way in the Story in Which We Find Ourselves*

#### **Outcome Objectives:**

1. Learners will examine a Christian worldview that endures through every shift and change in cultural worldviews.
2. Learners will identify ways in which the revelation of God provides disciples of Jesus with a biblical worldview that is based on seeing the world the way God sees it.
3. Learners will distinguish the difference between a modern worldview and a post-modern worldview.
4. Learners will identify how influence and power were vested in Christendom from the fourth century through the twentieth century.
5. Learners will examine the tendency of congregations to entrench in a world of modernity rather than courageously take the gospel to the prevailing culture.

#### **Introduction:**

1. Teacher will observe that one's worldview includes the presuppositions, beliefs, and values that shape how one see reality and determines how one will think and act. Scripture endures through every shift and change in cultural worldviews.
  - The apostle Paul addresses the importance of living in whatever worldview one finds oneself as disciples of Jesus, with a biblical worldview based on seeing the world as God sees it.
  - I Corinthians 1:18-25 contrasts the wisdom of God with the wisdom on humanity. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligent, I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." Verse 31 instructs Christians to boast only in the Lord.
  - II Corinthians 5:16 declares a Christian worldview, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Through we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if

anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

- Christians are to test every worldview according to Romans 12:1-2. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
2. Teacher will observe that scripture provides disciples of Jesus with a biblical worldview. Naturally Christians live *in* the world, but we are not to be *of* the world. How are disciples of Jesus to exist in the world, remain true to God, but not isolate themselves from living out the gospel in the culture in which they find themselves? Historians describe four major worldviews: classic, middle-aged, modern and post-modern, which have formed worldviews throughout the history of humankind. To investigate how today Christians will live out the mission of God in the culture in which we find ourselves, it is important to review the two most recent worldviews.
  3. Teacher will define a modern worldview by giving examples such as:
    - The Enlightenment (18<sup>th</sup> century) ushered in a worldview of rational thought and reason. Education, knowledge, literacy, belief, progress and scientific reasoning replaced the irrationality, superstition, and tyranny of the middle ages.
    - Churches of Christ began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century firmly rooted in rationality, reasoning, and right beliefs. Early on, the movement invited all people to “come and reason together.”
    - Churches of Christ, established in the American frontier, emphasized Bible study, biblical preaching, and scripture memorization. Rational thought, biblical literacy, and an emphasis of always going back to the Bible were the hallmarks of the movement.
  4. Teacher will define a post-modern worldview by giving examples such as:
    - In the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophers and social scientists began to describe a worldview turning toward globalization, consumerism, fragmentation of authority, deconstruction, and relativism.
    - Leaders in describing the worldview change claim that the golden dome of rationality collapsed. No single canopy emerged to replace rationalism. In a world of no absolutes, diversity, tolerance, and multiculturalism carry the day.
    - Leadership moved from hierarchical to sharing responsibilities through collaborative teams and empowerment.

5. Additional information to distinguish the difference between a modern worldview and a post-modern worldview is available on the attached chart (Attachment 1) The important thing to remember is that King David enlisted the men of Issachar because they understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” (I Chronicles 12:32) As the biblical passage notes, Christians live to the glory of God, and are charged with living out the mission of God in the culture, in the dominate worldview in which they find themselves.

### **Exploration:**

1. Teacher will identify the genesis of Christendom and provide a historical overview of Christendom from the 4<sup>th</sup> century through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - Constantine the Great, Roman emperor in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, made Christianity the religion of the state, which until then had suffered persecution.
  - Instead of martyrdom and persecution, Christians were welcomed into the center of power and influence. Cathedrals, positioned near the city center, provided clergy with a strong voice in political affairs and in all aspects of society.
  - For seventeen centuries (4<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>), Christendom enjoyed authority and significance in Western thought.
  - America, founded in the dawn of the Enlightenment, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, emphasized freedom of religion. Clergy provided an influential voice in schools, government, and commerce. Currency proclaimed “In God We Trust.”
  - As the worldview turned toward post-modernity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Christendom’s voice weakened and society began to marginalize Christendom. Churches became one of many influences in society, no longer providing a scared canopy.
2. Display the graphic found on Attachment 2, and invite the learners to identify ways in which they observe Christendom being marginalized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Possible responses include banning prayer in schools, nativity scenes removed from Courthouse lawns, and the Ten Commandments removed from some public venues.

### **Life Response:**

1. Congregations today may reflect characteristics of modernity more than post-modernity. For more than a quarter of a century, Churches of Christ have asked questions about our identity as a movement. This period may have served as a time of forging a new missional identity for our movement. The book of Exodus tells of the people of Israel serving as slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, and when freed by God through Moses, spent forty years wondering in the wilderness. Could it be that God was forging a new “identity” for his chosen people? Did he allow them to

travel for years in the desert to rid themselves of their identity as slaves and take on a new identity of free people in the promised land? Could God have used the time to cause the people of Israel to claim the Spirit of God in living daily as his chosen people?

2. Could it be that the cultural turning from a modern to a post-modern worldview during the past thirty or so years has forged a new missional identity for God's people? One author, Alan Roxburgh, declares that rather than seeing our current state as failure and loss, some are claiming the Spirit of God is inviting us to rediscover a missional heart in unimagined and unexpected places.
3. Roxburgh goes on to say, "One fears that in North America, rather than hearing this call of the Spirit to embrace and listen to the voice of God in a place of strangeness, the churches are continuing to work hard at rediscovering modes of existence and symbols of power that will move them back to an imaginary center. A return to a remembered Christendom or the old detent with modernity is impossible."
4. Roxburgh challenges readers with the observation that, "The only meaningful way forward lies in understanding and embracing our new position in the culture, in society. We must live with confusion and humiliation, as a hopeful people ready to discover the new things the Spirit will birth. The continued assumption of cultural symbols of power and success will only produce an inauthentic church with little gospel, much religion, and no mission." (page 47)
5. Learners are invited to respond to Roxburgh's claims about the current status of congregations in a post-modern world by answering the following questions:
  - Which of Roxburgh's claims do you agree with?
  - Which of his claims do you disagree with or challenge?
  - In what ways is our congregation successfully taking the gospel to the post-modern culture?
  - Where do you see the Spirit of God leading us in regards to taking the gospel to this culture?

## Missional Church in Post-Modernity

### “Understanding the Times” I Chronicles 12:32

<b>Principle/Venues</b>	<b>Modern</b>	<b>Post-Modern Turning</b>
<b>Organizing Principle</b>	<b>Rationality</b>	<b>Relational</b>
<b>Personhood</b>	<b>Individuality</b>	<b>Community</b>
<b>Truth</b>	<b>Prepositional/Right Answers (Absolutes)</b>	<b>Experiences/Story (Narrative)</b>
<b>Faith</b>	<b>Commitment to the truth of Scripture–nurture by church</b>	<b>Abstract concept, shaped by one’s own reality and understanding</b>
<b>Church</b>	<b>A place where something happens (Provider of “goods and services”) “Build it and they will come”</b>	<b>Living the reign of God as a community of disciples prayerfully joining together for missions, ministry and worship</b>
<b>Missions</b>	<b>Sending of missionaries to distant lands</b>	<b>Missional lives being lived by all of us in our families, marketplaces, in every context</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>Husband (father), wife (mother), marriage, children</b>	<b>Pluralistic lifestyles (same sex attraction, co-habitation, traditional family, etc.)</b>
<b>Christian Education- “Bible School”</b>	<b>Informational (literacy), formal classroom, curriculum, manuals (rationality primary)</b>	<b>Relational, narrative, non-formal (small groups, retreats, children’s musicals, Bible Time Marketplace)</b>
<b>Spiritual Leadership</b>	<b>Administrators, Managers, Trustees, Protectors</b>	<b>Shepherds, Visionaries, Strategic, Missional, Authentic Lives,</b>
<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Christendom, Center of Power and Influence</b>	<b>Post-Christian, Marginalized, Center moving to Africa, China</b>
<b>Ministry</b>	<b>Centered in congregation, led by staff over each division</b>	<b>Every member a minister, living out practices of Jesus in all of life.</b>
<b>Spiritual Formation</b>	<b>Dependent on Sermons, Sunday School, home devotionals, Lectureships, and Christian society</b>	<b>Events (feasts, celebrations, fasts as in O.T.), relationships, and journeying together</b>

“. . . men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” (I Chronicles 12:32) “. . . you can tell the weather by looking at the sky, but you are unable to read the signs of the times!” (Matt. 13:6)

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# Powering Down...



## The Marginalized Church

