

## MISSIONAL CHURCH: Treasure in Clay Jars

*Lesson Six: Practices That Demonstrate God's Intent for the World*

### Outcome Objectives:

1. Learners will understand that the church's life together is missional because the character of that life together is what God intends for the life of the whole world.
2. Learners will understand how these practices are habits and characteristics of the church community and not simply responsibilities of staff or the focus of programs.
3. Learners will explore practices that demonstrate the character of God such as listening to/spending time with one another, actively helping one another, bearing with one another, hospitality, crossing relational barriers.
4. Learners will explore how these internal and communal practices are meant to be lived out before "the watching world."
5. Learners will develop opportunities to practice the pattern of biblical formation and discipleship.

### Introduction:

1. Begin by reading the prayer of Jesus in John 17. Emphasize 17:23. Why does Jesus want unity? *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.* Indicate the missional focus of unity.
2. Teacher will direct the learners to "one another" texts that demonstrate practices of unity and love: Romans 12:9-13 (hospitality and bearing with one another); Romans 14:13 (resolving conflict, unity); 1 Cor. 1:10 (overcoming divisions); Eph. 5:19 (singing as a sign of unity); Heb 10:25 (spending time with one another/encouragement); 1 Peter 4:9 (hospitality). Note: Teacher may consider other "one another" texts or encourage learners to search for others. Ask learners to indicate the practice that demonstrates "one another unity" in each text.
3. Special Discussion of John 13: Teacher may choose to examine John 13 as Jesus' demonstration of and teaching about practices that demonstrate God's intent for the world.
  - a. John 13:1-17 is the narrative of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Teacher will emphasize Jesus' question to the disciples: "Do you understand what I have done for you?" How do we understand what Jesus has done? What does Jesus mean when he says, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."
  - b. John 13:31-38 is Jesus' new command. How is the practice of love for one another a demonstration of God's mission within the world? Teacher will indicate that the behavior of a loving fellowship is a witness to the watching world. ("Everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another.")

### Exploration

1. Teacher will explore with learners specific examples of practices that demonstrate the work of God among the congregation to cultivate unity and love.
  - a. Exploration Strategy: Encourage the class to share examples or stories about the church being recognized for practices that demonstrate the loving character of God. If you are aware of some of these stories invite people to class who can best tell that story. This is the practice of testimony. Perhaps there is someone in the congregation who became a member because of they witnessed in your congregation.
  - b. Suggestion: If learners cite programs within the church, press them to get more detailed about their reason for naming that program. What is the character of those who work in that program? Is that program successful because of their technique or because of the attitude and heart? The intent here is to emphasize that it is in the quality of our life together before the world that we demonstrate God's intent for the world and not simply in the application of formulaic methods.
2. Teacher will focus on four practices of the church's life together that demonstrate Christ-like love as a contrast to cultural norms. These are: a) listening to one another/spending time with one another; b) helping one another; c) bearing with one another; d) overcoming cultural barriers.
  - a. Listening to One Another/Spending Time with One Another: Have each group member write a number between 1 and 10 on an index card indicating how busy they feel their current schedule is. (10 = extremely busy/overwhelmed). Now have the group line up according to their numbers. Ask the 10's (or highest number) to relate why they feel busy. Ask the middle number(s) to relate why they feel as busy as they do. Now ask the lowest numbers to repeat what the 10's said. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate: 1) That "busy-ness" is a cultural norm that makes it difficult for us to listen and spend time with one another, and 2) that listening to one another is essential to practicing the sort of "one another" relationship that Christ calls us to for the sake of mission. (Transition: How can we help one another if we do not listen to one another?)
  - b. Helping One Another: Ask the group to discuss the phrase "God helps those who help themselves." Is this phrase biblical? (Some might even assume this is a Scripture). Ask the group to give biblical or personal examples of those God helps. How do these examples demonstrate the reign of God? Ask the group to discuss which is more consistent with the reign of God: actively helping one another or rugged individualism. Thought question: If we cannot be "one" by helping one another lovingly, can we really be "one" with God?
  - c. Bearing with One Another/Reconciling Differences: Teacher will indicate that genuine relationships will bring difficulties. Read Mt. 18:15-20. What is the common goal of every level of the attempt to reconcile with the sinner? (Forgiveness and Reconciliation.) How

does the practice of reconciliation and bearing with one another's weaknesses demonstrate God's presence to the world (cf. Mt. 18:19-20)

- d. Overcoming Cultural Barriers: Read Gal. 3:26-28 & Col. 3:11. Now invite class members to write down on index cards occasions when they became very aware of cultural barriers (discrimination, ostracism, class distinctions, or other barriers). It may be a personal experience or one they observed in any context. Tell the class that they should not identify themselves on the card. Now collect the cards, shuffle them, and redistribute them. Call upon class members to read what is written on the card they have. (Do as many as time permits). Ask the reader to relate how he/she feels about this experience of a barrier. Ask the class to recommend practical ways that unity in Christ overcomes these barriers. What can the church do to overcome these barriers and demonstrate God's intent for the world?

### **Response**

1. Close by singing "We Are One in the Spirit"
  - a. Before the group sings this song emphasize the chorus: "And they will know we are Christians by our love."