

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

### *Lesson Eight: Dependence on the Holy Spirit*

#### **Outcome Objectives:**

1. Learners will use scripture and theological reflection to explore the need for personal prayer in sustaining and motivating living missional lives.
2. Learners will grow in their dependence on corporate prayer as a source of strength for the missional congregation.
3. Learners will discuss the power of prayer in difficult and desperate situations.

#### **Introduction**

1. The teacher observes that Jesus' disciples knew he prayed often to the Father. When they woke up they knew to look for Jesus in solitary places where he prayed to his Father (Mark 1:35-36). The disciples wanted training in prayer so they asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). John's gospel records the lengthy prayer of Jesus in chapters 14-17. In comforting his disciples before leaving earth to return to heaven, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will come be with them. "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you (John 14:15-18).
2. Lead class discussion on how words in our language often change meanings over the centuries. For instance, a web was once only associated with a spider. Network no longer just means the big three TV networks. It has become a verb – "to network" with someone. Other words have more than one meaning. For instance, "head" refers to a body part, a key leader (head chef), to lead (to head a committee), to hit a soccer ball, of in reference to livestock (how many head of cattle do you have?)

Prayer has also evolved over the centuries. It once meant a carefully worded request made by an individual of low social station to a more powerful figure. Sometimes it took the form of a legal process, and the stakes were high. Many Christians would say that contemporary religious prayer still carries some of those earlier connotations of the word. But in many churches that is not the case. It has become ceremonialized or neglected. It commonly serves as a port in the storm or a routine religious exercise.

3. Review II Cor. 4:6-11.
4. When Christians are unable to articulate their thoughts and heart desires in prayer, scripture reminds us that the Holy Spirit translates and

- intercedes. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will (Romans 8:26-27).
5. “People sent on a mission who do not constantly pray are bound to lurch along in confusion and pain.” Clay jars can break, except for the sustaining life of Christ who fills them. (Acts 21:5, I Thess 5:17) “The missional church is incapable of fulfilling its call, save for guidance from the Spirit of God and for the Spirit’s empowerment of the church’s witness to that reality.” (p. 119)
  6. Invite the learners to think about ways in which the Spirit of God is empowering the congregation to witness to gospel to the culture. Ask them to talk (for 2-3 minutes) to one or two neighbors sitting beside them in class about what they are observing about the Spirit’s leading and empowering the congregation to become more missional. Record some of the responses on the white board at the conclusion of the sharing.

## Exploration

1. A curious reality in the past history of Churches of Christ relegated the Holy Spirit to the written words of scripture. Perhaps that is a manifestation of modernity when rationality provided an organizing principle, and our congregations reflected that worldview. Scripture paints another picture of the work and role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (Romans 8:9-11)
2. The courage to be risk takers for the gospel in today’s culture comes through the Holy Spirit that indwells and empowers. Wisdom to know how to go about living our lives as daily missionaries in our marketplaces is a result of the Holy Spirit’s work in each of us. The eyes of our hearts recognize the many places that God is working in the world through insights provided by the Holy Spirit. Through prayer we constantly seek God’s guidance, leading, and power to boldly live as people engaging the culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

3. In addition to the Holy Spirit working in our daily lives, the Spirit is working in our congregations to move us out into God's world with the good news of the gospel. **Treasure in Clay Jars** makes the observation, "It was a key discovery in these churches [congregations which were studied] that over the years they had lost the practice of depending upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. As one congregation phrased it, 'We have done a good job dealing with various tangible aspects of church life such as facilities and funding, but we are uncomfortable and inexperienced in dealing with the tough issue of being led by the Holy Spirit in present times.' That realization played a major role in the decision of these fellowships to discern God's call by recovering some of the ancient yet critical exercises of the faithful among them convening for the express purpose of approaching their God in prayer in order to hear God's voice." (page 122)  
Explore these questions with your learners:

- As you look around in your personal life, where do you see the Holy Spirit working? In what ways is the Holy Spirit leading you missionally?
- In what ways is the Holy Spirit working in and through the congregation?
- How do congregations discern the voice of God, the leading of the Holy Spirit from all the voices that speak so loudly in today's culture?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in personal and congregational prayer?

### **Response:**

1. Using the case study (Attachment 1), process the implications for the case by writing on the white board, "What is at stake?" Then under that phrase write "Hillside Church Leaders," and "Freedom Church of Christ neighbors." Invite learners to brainstorm what is at stake for each of these groups.
2. Conclude the session by interacting with learners using the questions at the bottom of the case study.

## **Freedom Church of Christ Case Study**

For more than sixty years the Elm Street Church of Christ met in the present location. Over the years the neighborhood changed to reflect neighbors who were socially marginalized, and fewer and fewer people attended the Elm Street congregation. Finally the eight remaining members decided they could not sustain the building, and they voted to donate the facility to a Church of Christ less than two miles away.

The Hillside Church of Christ gladly accepted the donation of the building and began to immediately make plans to plant a vibrant congregation in that community. One Monday evening fifty members of the Hillside congregation met at the Elm Street building before walking the neighborhood. They reminded themselves as they walked in pairs to constantly pray for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of their hearts to seek the ways in which God was already working in that area. A few Saturdays later they returned to the neighborhood and this time in pairs they knocked on the doors of every home within a mile radius of the building. They asked the question, "What kind of church do you want to be in this neighborhood?" People responded that they wanted to be a church that loved and worshiped God, who honored Christ, and who would address the drugs, domestic violence, and prostitution in the area.

During the next week the minister to children at Hillside organized prayer stations at the Elm Street congregation. Church leaders were stationed near the pulpit, in classrooms, in the worship center, near the water for baptisms, and in other strategic locations around the building. Families came and moved from prayer station to prayer station asking God's Spirit to create a new church in that neighborhood. Each leader asked for the Spirit of the living God to bless, anoint, and use the facility to the glory of God.

A few weeks later all the neighbors in the block surrounding the building gathered on a summer evening to share a meal, get to know each other better, and continue the conversation about what kind of church they wanted to be. The name Freedom Church of Christ was selected as they prayed that God would free the neighborhood of Satan's influence and work.

- How will wrestling with the question of 'what kind of church do you want to be' shape and spiritually form the Freedom Church of Christ in the future?
- How is that question different from, "What type of church would you like for us to establish in this neighborhood?"
- When new churches are planted, how can they reflect the ethnic, social, and education levels of the area and remain faithful to biblical principles of what it means to be a holy people gathered to worship and serve God?