

LESSON 1: ARE WE BEING TRANSFORMED?

Part 1: Introduction

Read the following stories.

Story 1: The Pastor's Wife

In South Asia, there was a pastor's wife who loved God and wanted to serve her community. As a way to help her neighbours, she was performing abortions. 'After all,' she reasoned, 'If a woman has 8 children and can't feed them, then isn't aborting the 9th a way to help?'

Story 2: A U.S. City

East St. Louis is a town of about 25,000 in the United States. There are 59 churches in the small town, and a majority of the people are Christians. But from 2000-2020, East St. Louis had one of the highest violent crime rates—and the highest murder rate—of any town or city in the United States.

Story 3: River Communities

Along the Amazon River, there are many remote communities that can only be reached by boat. Many years ago, there were no known Christians in these communities. Then missionaries came to these areas and preached and people were saved. The missionaries would stay for a while, plant a church, and then go on to the next community down the river. Now in the same remote communities, there are Christians all along the river, but all the villagers are so poor. Families barely have enough to eat. One way families get cash is to rent out their daughters as prostitutes when they are only twelve or thirteen. The fathers make their daughters available to the richer people in the community. The Christian fathers also do the same thing—renting out their daughters for money.

- What happened in each of these stories?
- Are these stories surprising or not? Why are they surprising?
- How do you think that God feels about these situations? Why?

Story 4: A Mountain Village

There was a small village in the mountains. It was in a poor part of the nation and the people lived very simply. They barely had enough to eat. They were dependent on the weather to determine how each year would be—would there be enough, or would they face shortages? They didn't have any latrines and lived in very basic housing. They weren't unhappy people but worked hard on the land, struggling year by year.

Thirty years ago, missionaries first came to this area and told them about Christ. As they listened and understood they started to believe, and many became Christians. The missionaries helped the people in the area to plant churches. The people regularly attended church. They were happy because they knew that when they died, they would go to heaven and they looked forward to that wonderful day when they would meet their Saviour. The missionaries left the area and the church continued under the local leaders. Thirty years later, the missionaries returned. The church had grown, and the people were committed to meeting together. However, the village was exactly the same. They were still very poor, and they still depended on the weather to determine if they would be hungry or have enough to eat that year. There were still no latrines in their community. Very little had changed.

- What happened in this story?
- Is this story surprising? Why or why not?
- What is the same about this story and the other stories?

Part 2: God's Laws

LARGE OR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Go through the 10 commandments in Exodus 20:1-17 and take some time to think about whether our lives would be better or worse if we didn't obey these commandments.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20.

- How does God describe His laws? Are they difficult or easy?
- In verse 15 what are the options before us? What would you prefer?
- What brings life and blessing?
- What brings death and curses?
- What does God want us to choose?

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14.

- What happens if we obey God's laws?
- Are these promises for life after we die or for our lives on earth?

Read Deuteronomy 28:15-19.

- What happens when we do not obey God's laws?

Part 3: Transformation in Fiji

Instructions: Read the following story about Fiji or, if you have time and capability, you may choose to show the 5-minute video of Transformation in Fiji (<https://www.sentinelgroup.org/let-the-sea-resound#Doc-Trailer>).

As you listen to the next story, think of how to answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the ways that the people started to obey God?
2. What are some of the ways they saw God bless them?

Fiji Transformation Story

Fiji is a nation made up of 322 islands. It is a beautiful area where many famous people go on holiday. Most of the income in the nation comes from the tourists. There are 900,000 people living in Fiji. Half of the people are native Fijian; nearly forty percent descended from Indian workers brought to Fiji by British colonist. The two groups don't always get along.

In May 2000, there was a coup. The government was taken over, and government officials were held at gunpoint for 56 days. In the streets, there was rioting, and people were killing each other. Soldiers attacked one another. The tourists stopped coming, so many people lost their income. Even after the members of the government were released, the country was still in chaos.

Before this time, the churches in Fiji did not work together or help each other. Instead they competed with each other. But when the coup happened, the churches realized that they needed to come together and pray for their nation. When they organized the first meeting, they didn't know if anyone would come, but the room was packed with church leaders. The pastors realized that if they wanted God to bless their nation, they had to work together and be united in prayer. This led to a new cooperation: The Association of Christian Churches.

In July 2001 Christians from all over the country joined together for joint prayer and Bible teaching. At the end of the time, the acting Prime Minister prayed. He asked God to forgive him and to guide him so he could honour God. Soon after that he became the Prime Minister of Fiji and looked for other godly leaders to serve with him.

In the past Fiji had been known for witchcraft and cannibalism. They had even made the victims cut firewood to roast their own bodies. This past—along with ongoing practices of witchcraft—had left a curse on the villages. There were mysterious illnesses and deaths. In some areas crops or fruit would not grow. In some places, no fish could live in the water.

One village was famous for growing drugs. A friend of the head drug dealer in that area became sick and feared that he would die. But his friends took him to a church to be prayed for. He was healed and gave his life to Jesus. When the people in the village heard what had happened, they also wanted to follow Jesus. They began to realize that they had been lied to by the devil. They stopped all the witchcraft in their area. Even the drug dealer became a Christian and stopped selling drugs. The village leaders started to meet together to pray every morning at 4 am. They asked for forgiveness and asked God to take over their community. And God heard their prayers! People that were often sick stopped getting sick. Trees that had no fruit began to grow fruit, and the sea was filled with fish where in the past there were only a few.

In another area, there had not been any fish for 55 years because poison had damaged the water. On the sides of the river, there were no crops. Everyone in the village came together to

confess the sins of their forefathers and to repent from witchcraft. They asked God to forgive them. For days, they would come before God and weep. Everyone brought their objects of witchcraft and destroyed them. As a result, God healed their water, and it was filled with fish. The land next to the river was also healed and started to produce many crops.

In the cities, there were also many changes. The churches would regularly come together to pray for their cities. They asked forgiveness for the way that they had treated each other before. The cities started to change. In the past people would not smile, but now they smiled. There was a reduction in crime, poverty, beggars, and street children. Children started attending school. The economy improved, and the tourists returned.

Meanwhile, the people who had tried to take over the government during the coup had been thrown into prison. Prisons were places that had no hope. But the churches started to go into the prisons. At first it was difficult. The prisoners had a lot of hatred in them, and they desired revenge against those who had thwarted their plans to take power. They were not ready to forgive. But God moved, and the prisoners repented and became Christians. God filled them with so much hope and joy! People walking past could hear people singing worship songs to God in the prison—it sounded just like a church!

Read together 2 Chronicles 7:14.

- What are the ways that the people in Fiji turned to God? Was it the same or different from 2 Chronicles 7:14?
- What did God do when they turned to Him? What are some of the ways God blessed Fiji?
- Can God do this in your community?
- What do the people in your church need to do according to 2 Chronicles 7:14 and the stories in this lesson?