

## A TRANSFORMED COMMUNITY

### CONNECTING & REFLECTING

- (i) What is one thing you can thank God for in the last week?
- (ii) Who have you shared with about what you learned in our last study?
- (iii) Which three people are you praying for to come to Christ?

The Holy Spirit transforms individuals, families, churches, and communities. The story in Acts 2 of the birth of the Church does not present the goal of the Holy Spirit's work in our world to merely save people who group together to form a local church. The vision of God for mankind is much bigger. Much. What God was doing in the Church of Acts 2 had an immediate impact on their community (Jerusalem) and was eventually felt in every part of the Empire (note Colossians 1:5-6, 23). Where ever a church ceases to regard itself as an agent of the Holy Spirit for bringing transformation to its broader community, it runs the risk of becoming irrelevant.

1. What was Christ's warning to the church in Revelation 3:1-3?

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What might have led to this warning being given?

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2. How did Christ describe His followers in Matthew 5:13-14, and what might this cause Him to expect of His Church?

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From history we can see that whenever God's people ceased to care about their communities, and not *shine their light*, the world around them got darker (note Psalm 74:20). For example, when Israel went deeper into idolatry, around 700BC, God's Word of Warning was fulfilled about them being "vomited out of the land" (Lev. 18:28) when the Assyrians came and exiled them from their land - never to return. About a hundred years later when Judah had ceased to walk with God and be "a light to the nations" (note Isa. 49:6; Acts 13:47). Interestingly, it was in this period that several world religions began including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, and Hinduism. Also interestingly, when the Church ceased to shine its light in what is now aptly referred to as "the Dark Ages", Islam commenced.

3. How should Christ's statement in John 17:14-16 be understood as it relates to how involved we get in our "world"?
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Wherever a church has had a vibrant and fruitful witness to its community, it has led to community transformation. Where God's people, the agents of the Holy Spirit, have not displayed the light of Christ to their dark world, divorce has run rampant (Mal. 2:16); violence has increased (Gen. 6:11), greed and corruption go unchecked (Jer. 22:17), and the vulnerable are oppressed (Ezek. 22:29). When a nation is blighted by corruption of officials, crime, and family-breakdown, chances are high that the Church has retreated. Some people think that the world is getting darker - but how much darker would it be if there were no churches bearing a prophetic-evangelistic light to their communities?

4. Read Acts 19:10-20. How does this passage show that the Holy Spirit's transformation of a community was genuine?
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5. Why do you feel that some churches do *not* have a vision to see their communities transformed?
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A local church does not have to be perfect before it can reach out. But its witness to its community is made all the more persuasive and effective by its conformity to what the Bible describes for the church.

6. Note the qualities of a Biblical church from these Scriptures -

(John 13:35)

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(John 17:21)

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(Eph. 4:1-3)

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(Eph. 4:11-12)

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(Heb. 13:1-7, 17)

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The Holy Spirit wants to transform our community so that Christ is honoured, His commands are known and respected (Matt. 28:18-20), vulnerable people are not oppressed (James 1:27), people are hospitable toward each other, marriage and family are valued (Heb. 13:4) and the rule of law is upheld (Rom. 13:1). This, of course, is only genuinely possible where *individuals* are transformed by the Holy Spirit so that families can be transformed, so that churches can be transformed. May God have His way in us, so that we can see our community transformed by the Holy Spirit.

*Amen.*