

# Session Three

Read the following sections on pages 9-10 of the Response Document:

- A. To engage in nonviolent direct action as a strategy for social transformation
- B. To challenge injustice by bringing it into the light

## Biblical Reference

"He said to them, 'When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.'" *Luke 11:2-4 (NRSV)*

### *A. To Engage in Nonviolent Direct Action as a Strategy for Social Transformation*

In *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus*, Obery Hendricks explains the significance of the historical context of "The Lord's Prayer" (Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-15). The Hebrew people suffered the occupation of the Roman Empire. Hendricks references the ancient historian, Josephus's account of the Roman Empire in Jesus times. In the days when Jesus was born, the Roman military crucified nearly 2,000 people in the Galilean city of Sepphoris as punishment for their rebellion against Roman rule. Caesar called himself "The Father" of his people.

The Romans understood Caesar to be the human representation of God and, as such, Caesar's name was deemed the most holy (hallowed) name. According to Hendricks, the Roman Empire's economic structure only allowed "the haves" access to daily bread. "The have-nots" did not have access. By design, swaths of the Roman kingdom were kept hungry and dependent. Hendricks explains that the Lord's Prayer represents a non-violent confrontation between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Caesar.

1. Reflect on the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-15). In Jesus's historic context, consider how Jesus' prayer is a prayer of non-violent resistance.
2. Consider the conditions of African-Americans in the Jim Crow south. How are their circumstances similar to the conditions of the Jews under Roman rule? How are they different?

### *B. To Challenge Injustice by Bringing it Into the Light*

## Biblical Reference

Read 1 John 1:5-7: <sup>5</sup>*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.* <sup>6</sup>*If we say that we have*

*fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; <sup>7</sup>but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (NRSV)*

### Activity

Imagine you are in a dark room. There is no light and no windows. In the room, there is a smell that comes from one corner, but you cannot see exactly where it is coming from and you cannot tell exactly what it is. You stumble across the room and flip the light switch. Across the room you find a dead mouse.

1. Consider the mouse. Without light things that are not supposed to live in the space are able to find a home. Likewise, actions that destroy are able to take place without repercussion. The only thing most people know is it smells in this place.
2. Consider the Civil Rights era. What societies or networks operated behind closed doors without the “light” of public accountability?
3. Consider the images of the children streaming from schools and singing as they marched down the street. Consider the images of Bull Connor’s fire hoses blasting the children. Consider the image of the police dogs that barked in the faces of children and chewed on women’s legs. What affect did the Children’s March in Birmingham have on the public’s understanding of the forces the Civil Rights movement were up against?
4. What did the march reveal to the rest of the country about the nature of the evil that lived under the cloak of darkness in the Jim Crow south?
5. John writes: “God is light and in him there is no darkness.” The Civil Rights workers saw their non-violent resistance as redemptive work. Non-violence redeemed their suffering and offered grace to their enemies. As their non-violent resistance shined light on the evil that lurked beneath the surface of the Jim Crow society, each action offered its architects and protectors opportunities to confess and repent.

Consider the current spiritual condition of our nation. Where were we before the Civil Rights movement? Where might we have been, if light had never revealed the evil that had lived in darkness under the blanket of the Jim Crow system? Where are we now? How are things better? Where do we need to shine more light today?