

Written for Gloria Dei Lutheran Church by Beth Tobin, September 2006, updated 2014, updated again 2018.

The Conversion of Saul

BIBLE SKILLS WORKSHOP:

Scripture References: Acts 9:1-27

Memory Verse: Psalm 25:4 (NIV)

"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior."

WORKSHOP SUMMARY: The children will learn about Saul/Paul's travels and the spread of the Christian church. They will explore a variety of maps and create their own map of Paul's travels as they consider how they carry the love of Jesus out into the world where ever they go.

Themes: God can change and transform lives.

Objectives for the rotation:

At the end of the rotation, the students will:

- be able to find Acts and know it is a history of the early Christian church.
- understand that anyone can be called to do God's work.
- know the story of Saul's persecution of Christians and of his conversion on the Road to Damascus.
- be able to contrast Saul before and after his experience on the road.
- be able to repeat the memory verse.

Additional Objectives and Life Application for the Bible Skills Workshop:

Students will be able to:

- recognize Paul as an apostle and writer of much of the New Testament.
- recognize God's use of unusual people to accomplish God's purpose.
- identify three places Paul visited or wrote to on his later journeys.
- explain how the movement of Christianity began to spread.
- identify two ways in which each student can help spread Christianity today.

Preparation and Room Set Up:

- Review the background information sheets and lesson materials.
- View the video Bible Study: www.GloriaDeiKids.org
- Make copies of maps and handouts as needed.

Welcome and Introductions:

Greet the children and introduce yourself. Wear your name-tag. (Remember, you are interacting with a different group of students each week who may not know you.) Make sure the children are wearing name-tags.

Please open with prayer and begin the lesson at 10:05. This will help the students transition into their time of learning. Students will be arriving and interacting with their shepherd(s) between 10:00 and 10:05.

Time Guidelines:

Bible Passage/Discussion Focus: 10 minutes

Map Exploration 15 - 20 minutes

Large Group Discussion 5 minutes

Reflection/Closing Prayer: 5 minutes

Closing begins in the choir room at 10:45 a.m. if you are finished with your lesson. If you are having a great discussion, keep it going.

Tell the children that today you will be learning about one of the early Christians’ greatest persecutors -- how he turned around from being a man who hated Christians to one of the greatest Christian missionaries who ever lived — all because of what happened on the road to Damascus and his encounter with Jesus.

Opening Prayer: Offer an opening prayer - your own or something like this: “Dear God, Thank you for this day and for all the people who are here. Thank you for the story of Saul. Help us to turn around when we go the wrong way, and like Paul, help us to share the story of Jesus with others. Amen

Bible Study: If children did not bring a personal Bible, use the classroom Bibles. Encourage children in grades 2-5 to bring their Bibles to Sunday School each week.

Ask children to find the timeline pull-out section in the back of their Connect Bible. One side shows Old Testament stories and one shows New Testament stories. Recall that the Bible is divided into these two main sections. While they are looking at the timeline continue talking.

OT stories take place before Jesus was born and NT stories begin with the birth of Jesus. The first four books of the NT are called the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Have the students repeat those with you. This is where we find the stories of Jesus birth, life, death, and resurrection. The next book,

Acts, is where we find the stories of the first Christian churches. The people who met Jesus and believed in him, and gathered together to worship God. This period in time is called the "Early Church" or you will hear people talk about "Early Christians." They are talking about this time right after Jesus' death and resurrection when the Church was just starting.

The story of the Conversion of Saul is found in the book of Acts. Explain to the children that Acts is short for Acts of the Apostles and the stories here tell about what happened to Jesus' followers after his death and resurrection. It tells the story of the early church. Acts is a book of history -- the only history book in the New Testament. Make sure they have found the Conversion of Saul story on the timeline. It's in the fourth panel titled, "The Apostle." All of the stories in this panel are about Saul/Paul. At the end of the lesson you might ask why they think the next panel is titled "The Church."

For Younger children: Have the children find Acts 9, and then you read it to them.

For Older children: Have the children locate the scripture lesson in Acts 9:1-27. Have them take turns reading the story to you.

**** Important --** Please explain to children that Saul's name was not changed by Jesus to Paul -- Saul's Roman name was Paul -- see background information for details.

NOTE: As the rotation progresses, the children will become more familiar with the story. Please encourage them to tell YOU what they know of the story. Then fill in the gaps and take the discussion to a deeper level using the discussion questions and background information.

Ask if there are any questions? Take a minute to write them down. As students are working on their maps, revisit the questions.

Memory Verse: Each rotation we encourage the children to memorize one memory verse. Review the verse with the children at this time.

Psalm 25:4 (NIV)

"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior."

Map Exploration

Lead the class in a quick movement break. Stretch North, South, East, and West etc.

Hold up the globe and have the children locate North America, The United States, Washington, Olympia etc. Do the same for Rome, and Jerusalem, helping students understand the location in which today’s story took place. Can they find Damascus?

Pass Out iPads: [Note use and care guidelines.] Give students the lock code and guide them to Google Earth. Zoom in and out from Olympia, to the world. Find Rome, and Jerusalem, as well! It’s fun to see the map jump back and forth between Washington and the Middle East, and will give students a good perspective of where this story is taking place in relationship to where we live. Can they find Damascus? Finding the location of this story will also help children understand that this story is a true story and really did take place.

Have students turn to Map Pages M14 and M15 in the back of the Connect Bible. M14 show’s Paul’s journeys. M15 shows the Early Church and key locations that are found in the Book of Acts. Talk about the Map Key on M14 and trace one or two routes.

Ask students to watch Video 1 found in the “Conversion of Saul” file folder on their iPad. This outlines Paul’s missionary journeys or “Three Big Trips” (2 minutes)

Video 2 is another great outline of Paul’s journeys and talks about when Paul wrote the letters that are included in the Bible! (2.5 minutes) It outlines Paul’s life.

Video 3: Excellent beginning map work to recognize the Holy Land as an anchor for more advanced map work. It’s not as interesting for kids but the first part is excellent for kids. They should recognize the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, Jerusalem, and the Mediterranean Sea. (3.5 min.) Just watch the first little bit. Ask students to find these features on the maps in their Bibles M14 and M15.

Video 4: Is an abbreviated animation of Saul on the Road to Damascus. This would be something to watch if there is time at the end of class. (2 minutes)

Video 5: Is for really young children and is a retelling of the Conversion of Saul. I would not recommend showing it unless you have a lot of time. The end of

this video is incorrect. Jesus did not change Saul's name to Paul. Saul was a Roman citizen. Please reference the Background information.

Other maps for students to explore are: "Atlas of the Bible Lands" p. 30 - 33, and the large wall map of Bible Lands.

Pass out the color maps of the Early Church. Have students circle some of the towns that Paul visited and/or wrote to: Rome, Corinth, the area of Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica..... Has anyone made the connection between these locations and the Books of the New Testament? If not, try and draw it out of them. Remind them that Paul wrote 13 books in the New Testament. Point out the New Testament Book Boxes. The Gospels are one color. Acts, the book of history, is another color, and the next group of books is another color — these are the letters that were all written by Paul.

Let students use Google Earth to find these communities today.

Distribute the map sheets and colored pencils. Ask the students to label some places that Paul visited - at least three - on their map, and draw a line representing one of Paul's journeys. Then have them color the water areas blue, and the land areas land colors.

While the students are working give them the following background on how the Early Christian church spread to these areas.

Recall the events of Holy Week and Easter. Students also hear about Jesus' ascension into heaven. What was going on at that time? The people who didn't like Jesus, also didn't like the disciples. The disciples spent a lot of time in prayer and deciding what to do. One of the first things they did was to appoint another disciple to replace Judas, Matthias. Then Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. People came to see what was going on and Peter began preaching about Jesus. Peter and John healed people in the name of Jesus and then preached and taught about him. The apostles continued to heal and to preach and more and more people believed in Jesus. The high priest had them arrested and thrown in Jail, but an angel came and let them out. Their numbers continued to grow and the high priest became more jealous and mad and then a man full of God's grace and power, Stephen, was stoned to death. This began a great time of persecution of Christians. Saul was one who went house to house and dragged Christian men and women and put them in prison. Many Christians fled to other communities to avoid being persecuted and with them the Early Church spread.

The apostles also began going to different communities. They would go to the synagogue or place of worship, and as was the custom, would be asked to speak. So they would teach about Jesus. If they were invited back they would stay and come back and teach some more. They would also preach and teach in the market places. If they were asked to leave, they would leave. If they were asked to speak again, they would speak again. This is how Christianity began to spread.

Saul was on his way to Damascus to round up more Christian men and women, when he encountered the bright light and heard the voice of Jesus. After this, he too traveled from place to place preaching the news of Jesus to all who would hear.

Large Group Discussion:

Once children have completed the map exploration and worksheets, have them discuss the different places they chose to include on their map. Be willing to share your own personal answers to these questions as well. This discussion will serve as a bridge into Journal time.

Ideas for Discussion Questions:

Choose from some of the following discussion questions. You will not have time to ask all of them. Suggested questions are in bold print.

- What is a Pharisee?
(religious leader who believed everyone must follow the written and oral laws)
- What did Saul do to Jesus' followers and the early Christians?
(arrested them, jailed them, killed them)
- Where do we first hear about Saul in the Bible? *(stoning of Stephen)*
- **How do you think some of the Christians felt about having Saul with them after he was changed?** *(worried, didn't trust him, afraid)*
- **Why did Saul have two names?** *(He had a Jewish name - Saul and a Roman name - Paul because he was a Roman citizen)*
- When did Saul become known as Paul? *(when he started traveling later on his missionary journeys to the Gentiles)*
- **How do you think Saul felt knowing that he had persecuted Christians before?**
- Paul wrote 13 of the New Testament books of the Bible -- they are letters to new churches. He became known as one of the greatest missionaries. **What do you think about God using someone like Saul/Paul to accomplish his purpose?**

- **Who did God use to help Paul change?** (*Ananias, Jesus, other Christians*)
- **Do you think God might use you to help someone else change? How?**
- **Has God ever used someone to help you change? In what way?**
- **How can you tell whether the change is something God wants?** (*if the change makes you a better person, it is probably something God would want - if it is destructive or wrong, it's not*)

Reflection and Journal Time (All Groups): The last 10 minutes should be reserved for Journal Reflection time. This is an opportunity for processing and reflection about what the children have learned. Workshop leaders and shepherds should sit down with children in small groups to facilitate discussion and writing on Faith Journals sheets. Adults should write as well. Children may copy the memory verse and illustrate it as an alternative to journal questions.

Journal Questions:

Where do you go throughout the week? Name three places. What is something you could do for God in each place? Or, in what ways could talk about God in these places? (Younger children could dictate to you or draw pictures instead of writing.)

Alternate Idea: Write or draw a letter to someone (relative or friend) telling them a story about Jesus and His love.

Alternate Idea 2: Write or draw how the early Christian church began to spread and grow.

Closing begins at 10:45 in the choir room upstairs. The following activity should take place if you have time. If you do not have time, send the journal pages home with the students.

Extra Activity: If you have extra time, review the memory verse with the children.

Scramble the boxes of the New Testament and as a class put them back in order.

Encourage the children to come back next week for another workshop, and to invite their friends. Remind them to bring their Bibles.

Closing Prayer: Ask for prayer requests and pray together.

Clean-up: Make sure names are on Journal Sheets and that they go home. Please arrange supplies neatly on the counter. The Conference Room gets used by many groups throughout the week.

Please place iPads in Beth Tobin's office and close the door. The door will be locked once closed. Thank you.