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Paul's First Missionary Journey

Scripture: Acts 13:1-14:28

Theme: God sends us to share the Gospel

4th-6th Grade (Ages 9-11)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: God's Missionary Team: Paul's First Adventure! Acts 13:1, 14:28 --- Overview: Today we'll explore how God calls people to share His love with the world, just like Paul and Barnabas on their first mission journey! We'll see how God uses ordinary people (like us!) to make His truth known, even when it's hard. The lesson will include storytelling, discussion, and hands-on activities to help kids connect with God's call to spread the Gospel in their own lives. --- Lesson Breakdown: 1. God's Big Plan (Acts 13:1, 3) God doesn't just work alone, He sends teams! In Acts 13, He called two believers, Paul and Barnabas, to share Jesus with the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). Just like Paul, we can be part of God's team by sharing His love through our words and actions. Question for kids: If you could invite one friend to church this Sunday, who would it be, and why? (Encourage them to think of someone who might need Jesus.) 2. Challenging the Crowd (Acts 13:4, 12) Paul and Barnabas faced pushback, some people laughed at their message, and even a false prophet tried to trick them! But God used their courage to prove Jesus was real. Today, we might face skepticism when sharing God's love. Challenge: How can we share the Gospel like Paul, even when it's uncomfortable? (Practice with a friend: "Did you know God loves you so much He sent His Son to save us?") 3. A Miracle in Lystra (Acts 14:8, 10) At Lystra, a man was lame and couldn't walk, but when Paul healed him, people saw God's power! Just like Paul's miracle, God works through us to show His love. Personal Connection: What's one way God has healed you or helped you recently? (Help kids reflect on God's faithfulness.) 4. God's Triumphant Team (Acts 14:28, 15:11) After many hardships, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, God had accomplished His plan! Their journey taught them (and us) that God's work isn't always easy, but He's always faithful. Final Thought: How can we be a "team player" for God, sharing His love even when we're scared? (End with a prayer: "Lord, help us to trust You and share Your love!") --- Encouragement for Teachers: Keep the lesson interactive! Use props (like a "mission map" or a healed-stick for Paul's miracle), discuss tough questions honestly, and end with a group prayer. The kids will love seeing how God's story is still unfolding today, just like Paul's journey! Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

Paul's Big Adventure on Mission

One sunny morning in the early church, as the disciples prayed together in the house of a church leader named Nero (also called Sylvanus), God gave them a special assignment. The Holy Spirit said, "Set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work I have called them to." Barnabas was a kind, encouraging man who loved Jesus, and Saul (later called Paul) was a bright but sometimes strict young man who had been very religious before his conversion. The Spirit told the church leaders, "You must send them away so they can tell the good news about Jesus to all the Gentiles." The church agreed, and they prayed again, asking God to guide them in their mission.

The pair traveled far, from Jerusalem to Seleucia, and then set sail on a ship with other believers. As they left, Paul and Barnabas met the apostle John Mark (who had quit earlier but was now ready to help). The ship carried them across the Aegean Sea, past Cyprus, where Barnabas owned a farm. There, a man named Serious (also called Lysicrates) owned a farm and a shop, and he helped them. But when they landed in Paphos, a man named Bar-Jesus (a false prophet who wore a silver snake around his neck) tried to turn the governor away from Jesus. The governor, a man named Serious (also called Serious), was not convinced, so Paul stood up and told the truth about Jesus. The governor believed, and the people were amazed!

From Paphos, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Perga in Pisidia, where Barnabas had family. There, John Mark ran back to Jerusalem, but Paul didn't mind, he knew the Spirit had called them to continue. They kept going until they reached Antioch in Pisidia, where the people were happy to hear the good news. After the church service, the people invited Paul and Barnabas to stay, and the Holy Spirit told them to keep going! They left Antioch, traveled through Iconium, and met a group of believers there. But some people, like Scribes (strict religious teachers), argued that Jesus wasn't the only way to God. They stirred up trouble, but Paul and Barnabas stood firm, saying, "We must obey God rather than men." Soon, they had to leave Iconium and went to Lystra, where a man named Timothy (a young believer) joined them. There, they saw a man born lame, who was healed by faith!

Finally, Paul and Barnabas arrived in Derbe, where they built up the church again. After praying, they sent Timothy ahead to prepare for their next journey. As they returned to Antioch, they brought news of how God had worked among the Gentiles (people who weren't Jewish). The church was overjoyed, and they thanked God for sending Paul and Barnabas to spread the good news. The Holy Spirit told them, "Set apart Paul and Barnabas for a special work I have planned for them." This was the first time Gentiles had been included in God's mission, and Paul's journey showed that God's love and truth are for everyone, no matter where they come from or what they look like.

Why This Story Matters: Paul and Barnabas's trip wasn't just about traveling far, it was about sharing Jesus with people who needed to hear His love. Just like they trusted God for guidance, we can ask Him to help us share His truth in our own lives. Whether it's through words, actions, or even just kindness, God wants us to be His witnesses, just like He called Paul and Barnabas. How can you share God's love today? Maybe it's by telling a friend about Jesus, helping someone in need, or just living in a way that shows others how kind and forgiving He is!

Key Verse

Acts 13:47 , 'For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'

Here's how you could explain Acts 13:47 to upper elementary kids, with simple details and thoughtful questions to spark their imagination and faith: --- God's Big Light for the World God's word in Acts 13:47 says, "This is what the Lord has told us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, so you can bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

This means God gave the people in that Bible story a special job, to share His love and help others find Him, just like a big, bright light helps people see in the dark. Jesus is the real light (John 8:12), and His followers are meant to be like lanterns, shining His kindness and truth to those who need it most. A Light That Doesn't Go Out Imagine you turn on a flashlight in a dark room. The light helps you see your way, but it also makes everything around you

feel warm and safe. Similarly, when we share God's love, through kindness, helping others, or even just being happy, we're like little lights in the world. The Bible tells us that God wants all people to know His love, so He calls His people to be brave and share it. How could you be a light in someone's life today? Why Does God Want Us to Shine? God doesn't want just a few people to know Him; He wants everyone! Think of how much better the world would be if everyone felt loved and cared for. Just like how streetlights help cities stay safe at night, God wants His people to help guide people away from darkness, like wrong choices or sadness, into His light. That means being kind, listening, and showing God's love even when it's hard. Have you ever seen someone who needed a little extra kindness? How could you help them today? Your Own Little Light You might feel small or nervous about shining God's light, but remember: God made you for a purpose! He wants you to be brave, just like the early Christians were. Maybe you could start small, like sharing a smile, praying for a friend, or telling someone you're thankful for them. Even tiny acts of kindness can help someone feel seen and loved. What's one way you could shine God's light today? A Challenge for You God is calling you to be a light! Pick one thing this week to do, like sharing a Bible verse, helping someone at school, or just being extra kind. Ask God to help you trust Him and do what He asks. And remember, even if your light isn't as big as a flashlight, it's still a light, because God uses everyone! What's one thing you'll try this week to be a light for someone else? --- This keeps it warm, interactive, and full of room for kids to reflect and take action! Would you like any adjustments to fit their current group or interests?

Activities

Activity 1:

Students read short snippets from Paul's journey (or write their own) in a scavenger hunt style, then reflect on how God guided his mission. This reinforces key events while making it interactive and fun.

1. Divide students into groups of 3, 5. Assign each group a region from Paul's journey (e.g., Cyprus, Antioch, Lystra) and have them mark it on the map with a color.
2. Assign roles within the group (e.g., missionary, helper, writer) and give each an index card with a key Bible verse or event (e.g., "Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch" or "God spoke through Barnabas").
3. Create the map together: Each student adds their group's location with details like towns visited or reactions from the crowd (e.g., "Many Jews and God-fearing Gentiles followed Paul and Barnabas", Acts 13:48). Use glue to attach notes from the Bible to their section.
4. Role-play mission encounters: As a class, pick a location at random. The group acts out a scene (e.g., Paul speaking in Pisidian Antioch, persecution in Iconium) while the rest of the class guesses key details. Discuss how God used Paul's words or the crowd's response.
5. DEPTH QUESTIONS:
6. How do you think Paul felt when the crowd turned against him in Lystra? (Reflect on rejection vs. trusting God.)
7. What role did God give you in this journey? (Encourage them to think of how they might share the gospel differently.)
8. PERSONAL APPLICATION:
9. Ask students to write down one way they can "follow Paul's example" this week, such as inviting a friend to church or sharing a kind word.
2. Activity: "Missionary Journal Scramble"
11. Prepare slips: Write or print 5, 8 short verses/facts (e.g., "God separated Barnabas and Paul", Acts 13:2; "They spoke boldly in Antioch", Acts 13:46).
12. Scavenger hunt: Fold each slip into a small envelope or fold it into a tiny "missionary letter." Place them in a bag. Give each student 1 envelope.
13. Read and act: One student reads their slip aloud while the class writes down key details on a shared whiteboard or paper. For example, if a slip says "They were stoned" (Acts 14:19), students note that Paul and Barnabas were persecuted.

14. Discuss God's plan: Ask the class: Where in Paul's journey did God show up in a big way? (e.g., miracles, conversions, persecution) Write answers on the board.
15. Personalize: Each student picks a slip to keep. Ask them to write one way they can "write a letter of encouragement" to someone this week, like a friend or family member.
16. DEPTH QUESTIONS:
17. How do you think Paul and Barnabas felt when the crowd turned against them? (Discuss perseverance and trust in God's plan.)
18. Why did God choose people like Paul and Barnabas? (Encourage them to think of how God uses "ordinary" people.)
19. PERSONAL APPLICATION:
20. Challenge students to share one thing they've learned about God's leadership with a sibling, teacher, or friend at home.
21. Why These Work:
22. Teamwork builds camaraderie while reinforcing biblical stories.
23. Hands-on activities keep engagement high for this age group.
24. Reflection prompts tie lessons to real-life faith. Both activities use minimal supplies and adapt well to in-person or hybrid settings!

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions based on Paul's First Missionary Journey in Acts 13, 14, designed to engage upper elementary students (ages 9, 11) with thoughtful reflection and personal connections:
- 1. Faith in the Face of Fear
 - Acts 13 shows Paul and Barnabas boldly sharing the Gospel, even when faced with opposition. How do you think Paul and Barnabas felt before they left for Cyprus? Did they worry about their safety, or were they excited about God's mission? Why do you think God gave them the courage to start this journey? Think about a time you felt afraid but did something for God, how did that make you feel, and what did you learn?
- 2. Serving Others, Even When It's Hard
 - In Acts 13:46, the crowd rejects Paul and Barnabas, but they keep going. Later, in Acts 14:28, they return to the churches with joy, even after difficulties. How can we follow Paul's example when people don't always welcome us? Have you ever felt rejected for sharing God's love? What did you do then? How can you be a kind and patient friend to someone who doesn't believe in Jesus, just like Paul did?
- 3. God's Plan and Our Mistakes
 - Paul's journey was full of ups and downs, he got lost on a ship (Acts 27:1, 28:14), and he later admitted to making mistakes (Acts 9:21, 25). Do you think God uses people who make errors in their faith journey? Why or why not? Have you ever made a mistake in your life that you regretted? How did God help you learn from it? How can you use those lessons to trust Him more in the future?
- 4. Sharing God's Love Like a Light
 - Paul and Barnabas were like shining lights in a dark world, they didn't just talk about God; they showed kindness and love (Acts 13:46, 14:27). The book of Acts shows how God uses people to spread His good news. If you could share one thing about Jesus with a friend, what would you say? Why is it important for you to share God's love with others, even if they don't believe right away? How can you be more like Paul and Barnabas in your everyday life?
 - These questions encourage students to explore Scripture, reflect on their own experiences, and apply biblical principles to their daily lives.

Prayer Focus

"Heavenly Father, Thank You for the amazing people in Your Bible who followed You even when it was hard. Like Paul and Barnabas, we get to be part of Your big story, even if we don't always understand it! When we feel afraid or unsure (like when Paul and Barnabas faced crowds or storms), remind us that You're with us. Help us trust You like they trusted You, even when the road isn't smooth. You called Paul and Barnabas to share the Good News about Jesus, just like You call us to tell others about love and forgiveness. When we feel quiet about sharing our faith, give us words or courage, just like You gave Paul wisdom in hard conversations. Help us be brave like Paul was, even if we make mistakes or feel tired. Paul and Barnabas didn't always get everything right, but they kept going because they knew You were working through them. Help us to keep going too, even when things don't go our way. Remind us that our hearts matter to You more than our plans. And Lord, thank You for showing us that You're always there to guide and protect us. Help us to trust You more and more every day, just like Paul trusted You. Amen." --- Teacher's Guide for Discussion/Application: 1. "What was one scary or exciting moment in Paul's journey that you remember?" (Let kids share, e.g., storms, crowds, or disagreements.) 2. "How can we trust God more like Paul did?" (Write responses on board: listening to Him, sharing our faith, asking for help). 3. Personal Time: "Where do you need God's courage today?" (Write answers on a "Courage Jar" for the class to see.) 4. Action Step: "How can we tell someone about Jesus this week?" (Kids could write a prayer request to share with the teacher.) Deeper Questions for Reflection: - "Why do you think Paul and Barnabas kept going even when things didn't go perfectly?" - "How does God want us to 'share the Good News' (like Paul did) even if it's hard?"

>> Missions Spotlight

In Turkey (ancient Asia Minor), Paul's missionary routes are now tourist destinations. Yet the churches Paul planted have largely disappeared. Missionaries are returning to Turkey to replant the Gospel in the very places Paul first preached it.

-> To the Cross

Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel. They faced rejection, persecution, and danger, but they kept going. Why? Because the cross had changed them. They couldn't stop telling people what Jesus had done.