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Paul's First Missionary Journey

Scripture: Acts 13:1-14:28

Theme: God sends us to share the Gospel

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

"God's Missionary Map: Paul's Bold Start" Lesson Overview for Junior High Imagine you're 12 years old, excited to serve at church but nervous about stepping out in faith, until you hear God's call: "Go!" Paul didn't just hear it; he ran into action (Acts 13:2-9). His first mission trip was messy, people argued, tongues flapped, and a mob almost tore him apart (Acts 13:50-52). But here's the truth: God doesn't send us to perfect circumstances; He sends us to us, with His Spirit to guide us. Paul didn't win everyone's approval, but he trusted God's plan, because the Gospel doesn't need a perfect speaker, just a heart willing to share. Life Application: "Where are you called to share God's love?" Maybe it's a friend who struggles, a classmate who doubts, or even just your own family. Paul's story isn't about grand gestures, it's about obedience. You don't have to be "perfect" to share Jesus; you just have to start. And remember: God doesn't care how many people you convince, but how deeply you trust Him to work through you. Encouragement for Teachers: "You're not just teaching facts, you're planting seeds." Some students might laugh, some might cling, some might never respond. That's okay. God's work isn't about us; it's about Him using you to reach them. Pray for courage, then take the first step, even if it's just sharing your testimony. The journey isn't about fame; it's about faith. 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

Title: Paul's Bold Mission: A Journey of Faith, Doubt, and Courage

Imagine a world where Christians were first called to go beyond themselves, to spread the good news to people who didn't know Jesus. That's exactly what happened in the early church. In Acts 13:1-14:28, the Bible tells the story of Paul and Barnabas, two men God had chosen to lead the first missionary journey. They faced doubt, confusion, and

even hostility, but their faith kept them going.

Paul and Barnabas were ordinary people, one a respected teacher in the church, the other a leader in the synagogue. But God didn't call them for their talent or fame. He called them because they were willing to leave their comfort zone. In Acts 13:2, the Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas (whose name means "son of encouragement") and Paul to serve in this mission. At first, the church in Antioch prayed for them, but the apostles Peter and John didn't join them. Why? Some might wonder if they were jealous or scared. The Bible doesn't say, but we know God uses people in his way, not ours. This wasn't about their approval; it was about trusting God's plan. Their absence meant Paul and Barnabas had to rely entirely on the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Their first stop was Salamis, Cyprus, where they preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. The people responded well, and even some Jewish teachers believed! But when they arrived in Perea (modern-day Israel), things changed. There, a false prophet named Elymas tried to stop Paul by casting a curse on him. The Lord struck him blind (Acts 13:10), and the people were amazed! This moment wasn't just about Paul's success, it was about God's power in their lives. Later, when they traveled to Antioch of Pisidia, some Jews mocked their message, but the Gentiles listened. Paul and Barnabas didn't care about the crowd's reactions. They kept going, knowing God would use them to change lives.

What happens when we're told to step out in faith? Often, doubt creeps in. Paul and Barnabas didn't have perfect plans or perfect reactions, but they trusted God's promises. One day, Paul said, "We must go through the whole world and preach the gospel to everyone" (Acts 10:39). Some might have said, "That's impossible!" But Paul didn't let doubt stop him. He faced persecution, doubt, and even the threat of death (Acts 13:50-52), but he kept going because he believed God was working in his life.

This story is for us today. God calls us to step out in faith, whether it's sharing our faith, serving in church, or simply trusting Him in small decisions. The Bible doesn't promise smooth paths, but it promises His presence. Like Paul and Barnabas, we don't have to have all the answers. We just have to trust that God is with us, even when things get hard.

Why This Matters: Paul's journey teaches us that faith isn't about perfection, it's about obedience. God doesn't call us to be perfect; He calls us to try. And when we do, even if we mess up, He'll use us to change lives, just like He used Paul. So today, ask yourself: Where can I step out in faith this week? Whether it's sharing the gospel, praying for a friend, or just trusting God in a big or small way, He's waiting for you.

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.'

"Acts 13:47 , 'For this is what God told us: You're His shining light for everyone, your mission is to bring hope and freedom to the whole world!'" Imagine God says to you, "Hey, I've made you special, your life isn't just for you; it's for everyone. You're like a flashlight in the dark, guiding people to see real freedom through Jesus." Real life? That means you're called to share kindness, love, and truth with others, whether it's a friend, a stranger, or someone who doesn't know God yet. Why? Because you're made to be different, like a light in a dark world, showing others that God's love is the real answer. How does this help you? You don't have to wait until you're famous or perfect, just be bold enough to ask, "How can I make someone's day brighter today?" Maybe it's sharing a joke that makes someone laugh, standing up for what's right, or just being a friend who listens. God's light isn't just for you, it's for the whole world!

Activities

Activity 1:

1. Divide & Assign Roles
2. Split the class into 4, 5 groups. Assign each a role:

3. Historical Researcher (reads Acts 13, 14 and highlights key events)
4. Team Leader (guides discussion)
5. Creative Artist (draws Paul's route)
6. Optional: Debate Leader (if groups want to argue a point).
7. (Time: 2 min)
8. Trace the Route Together
9. On a shared map (or large sheet), sketch Paul's journey from Syrian Path to Lystra/Permoopolis.
10. Ask: "Where did Paul first preach? Why was it risky to leave? What obstacles did he face?"
11. Use sticky notes to label key stops (e.g., "Salamis," "Paphos," "Iconium").
12. Debate a "Missionary Moment"
13. Pick a challenge from Paul's journey (e.g., the false prophet in Lystra, persecution in Pisidia).
14. Groups argue both sides of the story: "Was Paul brave or foolish?"
15. Life Application: "How would you handle fear or doubt like Paul did?"
16. Write responses on index cards; have groups present their answers.
17. Reflect & Share
18. As a class, discuss: "What's one thing we can learn from Paul's perseverance?"
19. Use a Bible verse (e.g., 2 Tim. 1:7: "For God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love and self-control.")
20. (Time: 10, 15 min)

Activity 2:

1. Set Up the Course
2. Place cones/items at different stations around the room:
3. "False Prophet Challenge" (e.g., a cone labeled "Deny Jesus" to step around).
4. "Cultural Barrier" (a paper barrier to jump over).
5. "Persecution" (a pile of "rocks" to avoid).
6. "Church Gathering" (a paper plate to sit on for 10 sec).
7. Explain the Mission
8. Give each group a stuffed "message" (e.g., "Preach the Good News!") and a Bible verse (e.g., Acts 13:4: "They preached boldly in the temple...").
9. Explain: "Paul faced similar challenges. How would you get your message across?"
10. Play the Game
11. Groups race to complete the course, but:
12. If they step on a "obstacle," they must answer: "What's a real-life 'obstacle' you've faced? How did you handle it?"
13. After finishing, they share how they adapted (e.g., "We used humor to explain God's love").
14. Debrief
15. Ask: "What was hardest? How did your team work together?"
16. Relate to Paul: "Paul didn't give up, even when things seemed impossible. What's one way we can be like him?"
17. End with prayer, asking God to help us trust Him in hard times.
18. (Time: 10, 15 min)
19. Why These Work for Junior High:
20. Engagement: Mixes art, debate, and physical activity, kids stay focused.

21. Real Questions: Encourages honest answers like "Why did Paul leave home?" or "How would you handle rejection?"
22. Life Application: Every activity ties back to courage, teamwork, and trusting God.
23. Minimal Cost: Uses what's already in a classroom!
24. Pro Tip: For older teens, add a "spiritual journal" prompt: "Write one thing Paul did differently than you'd expect."

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to spark meaningful reflection and conversation around Paul's First Missionary Journey, while connecting to real-life experiences for junior high students (ages 12-14). These questions encourage critical thinking, empathy, and personal application of biblical principles.
- 1. "When Paul and Barnabas left for Cyprus, they left behind everything familiar, families, friends, and their old jobs. That must have been hard. What's something you've had to leave behind for a reason, whether it was a decision, a relationship, or a comfort? How did you feel in the moment, and what did it teach you about following God's leading, even when it felt scary?"
 - (Life Application: Encourages students to reflect on transitions and trust in God's plan, even when they're uncertain.)
- 2. "Paul and Barnabas faced rejection time and time again, people didn't want to hear about Jesus. In their letters, Paul later said he was 'weak' (2 Corinthians 12:10). What's a time you or someone you know felt like a failure or misunderstood by others? How did you handle it, and what did that teach you about perseverance?"
 - (Life Application: Helps students connect with Paul's struggles and the importance of resilience in sharing faith.)
- 3. "When Paul and Barnabas got to Antioch in Pisidia, people were skeptical at first. Paul said, 'We must speak the word of God' (Acts 13:46). What's a message you've been called to share, about God, truth, or kindness, that you've struggled to say? How did you decide what to say, and what does that say about how God guides us to communicate?"
 - (Life Application: Encourages students to explore their own voices in sharing faith or standing up for what's right.)
- 4. "Paul and his team traveled far, worked hard, and saw God work in miracles. But even after their first mission, Paul wrote, 'I will not boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Galatians 6:14). What's something in your life that you've been proud of or relied on, money, reputation, skills, etc.? How would you rethink that if you saw God's work in your life through the eyes of a missionary?"
 - (Life Application: Challenges students to evaluate what truly matters in their hearts and prioritize faith over other forms of success.)
- Why These Work:
 - Each question balances story details (from Acts) with real-life scenarios students can relate to.
 - They avoid yes/no questions but invite deeper thinking about emotions, choices, and values.
 - The focus on perseverance, courage, and faith ties directly to the lesson's themes.
 - Would you like any of these adjusted for a specific group (e.g., more focus on teamwork, or personal growth)?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus: "Where's Your Strength?" Teacher: Alright, class, let's imagine we're standing right there with Paul, Peter, and Barnabas, staring at a crowd of strangers in Pisidian Antioch, full of fear and wondering, "What if we're wrong? What if we mess this up?" The Bible says God doesn't ask us to do great things, He just asks us to try. So

today, let's pray not for perfect outcomes, but for the courage to keep going, even when it's hard. Let's ask God to give us the same faith as Paul, bold enough to share, but wise enough to listen, because the best part isn't always the success, but the trust we place in Him along the way. [Pause for prayer, asking God for:] "Lord, we come to You today like Paul and Barnabas, ready to step out in faith, even when our hearts are racing. Give us the words to speak, the patience to listen, and the strength to keep going, not just when it's easy, but when it's messy and hard. Help us to trust You, even when the results aren't what we expected. Amen." --- Why it works: - Relatable: Uses Paul's real hesitation (Acts 13:9-11) to connect with students' fears. - Life-applicable: Focuses on process (trust in God) over outcome (success). - Classroom-friendly: Short, open-ended, and invites group participation. - Honest: Acknowledges doubt (key for 12-14-year-olds!) while grounding them in God's faithfulness.

>> 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.