
Forward

This book contains lessons from the book of Acts. Your students will learn about the early Christians and how the Holy Spirit came to bring them power to live godly lives and to share Jesus with others. They will come to desire the strength of the Holy Spirit to say, “No” to sin. They will be encouraged to trust and rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit for comfort in times of trial. Finally, they will discover the power of prayer which will strengthen their faith and give them the proper perspective on the things that happen to them in life.

I have designed these lessons to enable you to teach the Bible expositionally. The idea is to have the kids read the passages in their own Bibles and the teacher explain the scriptures and give good practical applications that are age-appropriate. My goal is to ensure that children learn that God's Word is exciting and meaningful and that teachers teach sound doctrine!

Even though I've scripted the lessons, I don't expect teachers to read my lesson materials verbatim to the children as they teach. My lessons are meant to provide the details you need to get background information and some suggestions for child-oriented personal application. Once you know and understand the Bible lessons for yourself, you'll be ready to teach your class.

The two-column layout of this book is designed so that you can copy and cut the pages in half to fit into your Bible. When the children observe that you are teaching right out of the Bible, rather than from a curriculum book, it validates God's Word and gives your teaching more authority.

You will discover that there is not always a Craft or Game idea suggested in each lesson. When I've had a good idea that really seems to support the lesson objectives, I've included it. But I have another handbook called *Tips and Tricks — Making Children's Bible Lessons Come to Life* that gives lots of suggestions for activities that

will help reinforce your lesson and teach the memory verse. (This is available from my website:

<https://www.freechildrensministrylessons.com/>)

Use the Teaching Schedule to help you organize your teaching rotation.

I pray that you will use these lessons for God's glory by teaching the Bible as an entire plan by a systematic and connected study of the Word.

Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)

Sheila Scroggins

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Teaching Schedule

Date	Teacher	Lesson	Memory Verse
		Early Christians Witness God's Power (Acts 2:1-47)	<i>You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)</i>
		Lame Man is Healed (Acts 3:1B 4:4)	<i>You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created. (Revelation 4:11)</i>
		Ananias and Sapphira Lie to God (Acts 4:32 B 5:14)	<i>The righteous hate what is false. (Proverbs 13:5) and/or Surely You desire truth in the inner parts. (Psalm 51:6)</i>
		The Apostles Are Persecuted (Acts 5:17-42)	<i>Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (Matthew 5:11)</i>
		Saul Becomes a Believer (Acts 9:1-22)	<i>God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)</i>
		God Delivers Peter from Prison (Acts 12:1-19)	<i>The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16 NIV)</i>
		Paul and Silas Rejoice in Prison (Acts 16:16-40)	<i>Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)</i>

The Early Christians Witness God's Power

(Acts 2:1-47)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Is it hard for you to talk to someone about the Lord? [Teacher, discuss problems that make witnessing difficult — feeling of shyness, not knowing who to talk to; being afraid of ridicule or persecution; not knowing what to say.]

If you are a true believer in Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit living inside you to help you witness. He gives you the power to share the good news about Jesus.

Today we're going to learn about when God first sent the Holy Spirit to the believers.

Opening Prayer

Father, we are so glad that you have sent us the Holy Spirit. He is our Comforter, our Helper in times of need. He gives us the power to live a life in victory over sin and He gives us the courage we need to tell others about Your love for us. Thank You that You have provided us with resurrection power — the same power that raised Jesus from the dead — through the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Lesson

Three days after Jesus had been crucified on the cross, the disciples discovered His empty tomb. Then they met their risen Savior who told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4-5

Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. (5) John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would fill the disciples with power.

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

People from many countries had come to Jerusalem for the Jewish celebration of the "Day of Pentecost." God commanded the Israelites through His servant Moses to come together to celebrate seven different annual feasts each year. One of them was called the "Day of Pentecost" or the *Feast of Harvest*. It is like the American holiday of Thanksgiving, it is a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops. Pentecost is held 50 days after Passover.

It was now 50 days since Jesus' resurrection and 10 days since His ascension up to heaven. And, Jews of many nations had gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost.

The disciples were all gathered together, waiting for the Lord to fulfill His promise to send the Holy Spirit Who would give them power to be witnesses for Him.

Acts 2:1-4

On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. (2) Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. (3) Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. (4) And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

God made His presence known to this group of believers in a spectacular way — violent wind, fire, and His Holy Spirit. This was a fulfillment of John the Baptist's prophesy when he said that there was one coming who "*will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*" (Luke 3:16)

The scripture says, the Holy Spirit looked like "*divided tongues, as of fire.*"

- Tongues symbolizes speech — God wants us to tell people about the good news of Jesus taking our punishment for sin.
- Fire symbolizes God's purifying presence, which burns away the undesirable parts of our lives and sets our hearts on fire for Him.

Then, the disciples began to speak in other languages.

Acts 2:5-8

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. (6) When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. (7) They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, (8) and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!

All the foreigners in Jerusalem at that time could hear the disciples speaking in their own language.

Acts 2:11

(both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!"

The people from all these various countries were amazed to hear God being praised in their own native tongue!

Acts 2:12

They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other.

They could hardly believe their ears! Some people made fun of the disciples, saying they were drunk.

Acts 2:13

But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!"

But Peter, now empowered by the Holy Spirit explained...

Acts 2:14-15

Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. (15) These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that.

Here is Peter who only a few days before had been a coward and deserted the Lord Jesus in His deepest hour of need. Peter who had denied that he even knew the Lord, was now speaking boldly to the crowd, unashamed!

Peter went on to tell the people that it had been God's plan for Jesus to be put to death and raised from the dead.

Acts 2:22-24

"People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. (23) But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. (24) But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.

Acts 2:32-33

"God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. (33) Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today.

Acts 2:36

"So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!"

The Holy Spirit was using Peter's message to work in their hearts.

Acts 2:37

Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"

Acts 2:38

Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Wow! Peter was boldly used for the Lord, wasn't he? He was empowered by the Holy Spirit!

When you call on the Lord Jesus to save you, God the Holy Spirit comes to live inside you to help you. The Holy Spirit gives you the power you need to live boldly for the Lord, to make godly choices, to say, "No!" to sin, and to speak with confidence about the things of the Lord. When you live this victorious Christian life, it is hard to not want to tell everybody you meet about Jesus!

The Holy Spirit enabled Peter to stand up and tell thousands of people about what the Lord Jesus had done for mankind. He became a powerful witness for the Lord. When Peter finished talking, the people were convicted by God's Spirit, they wanted to know how to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, too. Many people received Jesus that day!

Acts 2:41

Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

Everyone in the world is born a sinner and needs to be saved. Everyone needs to hear the wonderful good news that Jesus came and took the punishment for sin. But, is it hard for you to tell people about Jesus? Remember God is all-powerful and you have His Spirit inside you! What can you do when you feel too shy to talk to someone? Remember that the Holy Spirit is in you and gives you power! What can give you courage when you are afraid to speak up for the Lord? Thank God that the Holy Spirit lives in you to help you be brave! You can count on the Holy Spirit to help you and to work in the hearts of those who listen.

Object Lesson:

Have the children sit in a circle. Give each child an empty paper cup. Ask, "What's inside your cups?" Hold up a paper cup, and say, "If we don't have Jesus in our lives, we may be like these cups: empty inside with nothing to give other people." Pour water into the cup you're holding. Say, "When we believe in Jesus and ask Him to be the Lord of our lives, God promises to pour His Spirit into us and fill us with His love, just as the water fills this cup."

Ask the children:

- Why did God give us the Holy Spirit?
- What happens when we're filled with God's Spirit.

Have the children stand in a circle, holding their paper cups. Say, "Let's see how being filled or baptized with the Holy Spirit helps us live a victorious Christian life." Pour your water into another person's cup and whisper, "The Holy Spirit gives you strength." Then have that person pour the water into the next person's cup and repeat, "The Holy Spirit gives you strength." So on around the circle. Go around the circle again saying, "The Holy Spirit gives you comfort." Ask the children to think of things that the Holy Spirit gives them when they are filled with the Spirit of God. For example,

- The Holy Spirit gives you wisdom.
- The Holy Spirit gives you power to say, "No!" to sin.
- The Holy Spirit gives you power to live a Godly life.
- The Holy Spirit gives you power to tell others about Jesus.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for sending us the Holy Spirit who gives us the power we need to live godly lives before You. Forgive us those times we forget to call upon Him when we need Him so desperately. We are so weak without Him and we need Him so badly. Thank You that Your power is only a prayer away. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CRAFT CORNER

Create a Tract: Using the pattern on page 6, let each child make a booklet by folding the page in half and then in half again. Or, give each child a paper on which they can print out neatly, the following:

Jesus can save you from your sin

Admit you have sinned. "All have sinned" (Romans 3:23)

Believe Jesus died for your sins. "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3)

Call on Jesus to save you (Romans 10:13)

Demonstrate how a tract can be used; give children an opportunity to practice in class with a partner.

GAME CENTER

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

Review questions:

1. What Jewish celebration was going on that brought all the foreigners to Jerusalem? (Pentecost)
2. What is Pentecost? (It's like Thanksgiving; it's a festival of thanksgiving for the harvested crops.)
3. In what spectacular way did God send the Holy Spirit to the believers? (Violent wind, tongues of fire.)
4. Why did God send tongues of fire? What did the tongues and the fire symbolize? (Tongues symbolized speech and fire symbolized God's purifying presence.)
5. What did the disciples begin to do when the tongues of fire sat upon them? (They began to speak with other tongues or languages.)
6. What did all the foreigners in Jerusalem think was happening? (They were all amazed and marveled; then some of them began to make fun of the disciples, saying they were drunk.)
7. What did Peter do? (He stood up, raised his voice, and began to explain God's plan of salvation.)
8. What suddenly gave Peter the courage he lacked only a short time before? (He was filled with the Holy Spirit.)

9. What was the reaction of the crowd of people when they heard Peter preach? (After Peter's powerful, Spirit-filled message, the people were deeply moved and asked, "*What shall we do?*")
10. What did Peter tell the people to do when they asked, "*What shall we do?*" (He told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.)
11. In what amazing way did the Holy Spirit use Peter's message? (3,000 people gave their hearts and lives to Jesus!)
12. How do you receive the Holy Spirit? (When you call upon the Lord Jesus to save you.)
13. What does the Holy Spirit give you? (The power you need to live boldly for the Lord, to make godly choices, to say, "*No!*" to sin and to speak with confidence about the things of the Lord.)
14. What can you do when you feel too shy to talk to someone? (Remember that the Holy Spirit is in you and gives you power.)
15. What can give you courage when you are afraid to speak up for the Lord? (Thank God that the Holy Spirit lives in you to help you be brave! You can count on the Holy Spirit to help you and to work in the hearts of those who listen.)

Believe

Jesus died for

Your sins

“Christ died for

Our sins”

(1 Corinthians

15:3)

Call

On Jesus

To save you

(Romans 10:13)

(Romans 3:23)

“All have sinned”

Sinned

You have

Admit

Your sin!

From

Can save you

Jesus

A Lame Man is Healed

(Acts 3:1--4:4)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Do you sometimes feel you are a little better than some other children? When someone pays you a compliment for something you have done well, do you brag about your ability? After coming through a hard time, or helping someone else with a problem, do you pat yourself on the back? When God provides something for you or helps you do something, do you remember to give honor to God for what He does in your life? To give honor to God is to give Him a high place in your thinking because of what He is like or what He has done for you, and to tell others how great He is. We need to give the honor and praise to God.

Opening Prayer

Father, open our spiritual eyes and ears this morning to hear Your voice through the teaching this morning. We want to learn how to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to You. Guide our thoughts and our words as we study Your word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Memory Verse

You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.
(Revelation 4:11)

Lesson

We have been studying about the very beginning of the Christian church. Last week we learned about when God sent the Holy Spirit with a violent wind and tongues of fire. Right after the believers witnessed this spectacular out pouring of the Holy Spirit, the disciples continued meeting together each day faithfully to learn about Jesus. They shared their money, clothing, and food with each

other. And God confirmed His word among them through many signs and wonders.

One afternoon Peter and John went to the temple to pray. At this time in Jerusalem there was a poor lame man who had never been able to walk. Because there was no work he could do, he had to sit outside the Temple and beg people for money.

Acts 3:1-2

Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. (2) As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple.

This poor lame beggar was 40 years old (see Acts 4:22). Every day his friends carried him to the gate, which was called Beautiful. There he was left for the remainder of the day. Many people passed by the man on their way to and from the Temple, and often they gave him money. Sitting at the temple gate was a good location to beg because many people thought that giving money to the poor would gain them favor with God.

Then the man asked Peter and John for money.

Acts 3:3-4

When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money. (4) Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!"

Peter said they had something better than money to give this man.

Acts 3:5-6

The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. (6) But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"

The crippled man asked for money, but Peter gave him something much better — the use of his legs. We often ask God to solve a

small problem, but he wants to give us a whole new life and help for all our problems. When you ask God for something, don't be surprised when he gives you what you really need.

Acts 3:7-8

Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. (8) He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

He was able to walk immediately even though he had never learned how. This was a miracle! A miracle is something that only God can do.

Peter had been the one who spoke to the lame man and took his hand to help him up. It would be easy for him to take credit for what God had done. But he knew that the healing came through the power of the Holy Spirit, not his own. Peter wanted to give the honor and praise to whom it was due: God.

The man was so excited he couldn't stand still! It says he leaped up and went into the temple with Peter and John walking, leaping, and praising God! And people were amazed to see him...

Acts 3:9-11

All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. (10) When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! (11) They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John.

The people couldn't believe their eyes! They looked at Peter as though it were his power or godliness that had done this, but Peter gave the honor to God.

Acts 3:12-16

Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. "People of Israel," he said, "what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? (13) For it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate's decision to release him. (14) You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. (15) You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact! (16) "Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed—and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus' name has healed him before your very eyes.

Jesus, not the apostles, received the glory for the healing of the crippled man. By using Jesus' name, Peter showed who gave him the authority and power to heal. The apostles did not emphasize what they could do, but what God could do through them. Jesus' name is not to be used as magic — it must be used in faith. When we pray in Jesus' name, we must remember that it is Christ himself, not merely the sound of his name, who gives our prayers their power.

When God does something spectacular in your life, be sure to give him the honor. Instead of bragging when someone compliments you, say, "Thank you" and "It was God who helped me." When God helps you through a hard time, or uses you to help someone else with a problem, remember to thank God. Then honor God by praising Him as you share with others what He did. You might say, "I really appreciate God helping me not to be so lonely when my friend moved away." or, "I thank God I could be of help to you." God is the One who is worthy of our praise and honor.

This week honor God by thanking Him and telling Him how much you appreciate Him. Then share your appreciation of God with someone else, so they can see how great God is?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we want to give You all the glory and honor that's due Your name. As we sit here quietly for a moment, fill our hearts and minds with the wonder of You! You are so great and awesome and loving and kind. We love You, Lord. Thank You for all the great and wonderful things You've done in my life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CRAFT CORNER

Take Home Activity: Prepare a card for each child to fill in during the week:

<p><i>Give honor to God for what He does in your life</i> (Revelation 4:11)</p> <p>What is one thing God did for you this week?</p> <p>How did you give honor to God?</p>
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Next week any child that wants to, can honor God by sharing what God did for them.

GAME CENTER

Allow the children to act out this story using dress up clothes.

Pop-The-Question —

Write the review questions on separate slips of paper and insert them into balloons. Blow them up. Let the children pop a balloon, one at a time, and answer the question. Small children may wish to have someone else pop their balloon for them.

Variations:

- Insert numbers that correspond to a list of questions instead of the questions.
- Put the game point values on slips of paper in the balloon. So, for every right answer they can pop a balloon and see what points their team gets.
- Each child gets a chance to throw a ball into a basketball hoop. For making a basket, the child gets to choose a balloon, pop it and try to answer the question. His team gets 50 points for every right answer.

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

Review questions:

1. Why was the man begging at the temple gate? (Sitting at the temple gate was a good location to beg because many people thought that giving money to the poor would gain them favor with God.)

2. What would your life be like if you couldn't walk? What would your social life be like? How would things be different for you economically?
3. How would you feel if you were in his condition?
4. How was it possible for the disabled man to survive? (He depended totally on his friends to help him.)
5. What did the disabled man ask Peter and John for? (Money)
6. Is what the man wanted, what he needed most? What did the man at the Beautiful Gate need most: money or the physical healing of his legs? (Legs!)
7. What was the lame man's reaction after he was healed? (He jumped up and praised God.)
8. How did people respond to the lame man's enthusiastic reaction to his healing? (They were amazed and awed by God's power.)
9. Why do you end your prayers with the phrase, "*In the name of Jesus. Amen?*" Does that actually do any good? (It is Christ himself, not merely the sound of his name, who gives our prayers their power.)
10. What reaction will other people have if you are enthusiastic about what God has done for you? (We will be a positive influence on others.)

Ananias and Sapphira Lie to God

(Acts 4:32 – 5:14)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, put on a mask and ask the children:] "*Why do people wear masks?*" (So they can pretend to be something or someone they aren't; or, to hide who or what they really are.) Is it possible to hide who we are or pretend to be someone else without wearing a mask? (Yes!)

The husband and wife in our lesson today tried to fool all their friends in their church group by pretending to be something they were not. Do you think they fooled God? Why not? (God is all-knowing!)

Opening Prayer

Father, You hate that which is false. It grieves Your heart when we are dishonest. There is no such thing as a little white lie. All falsehood is sin to you. I pray that this morning as we learn about horrible consequences to Ananias and Sapphira for telling lies, it will prick our hearts and cause us to strive to be honest in all we think, say, or do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Memory Verse

The righteous hate what is false. (Proverbs 13:5)

And/or

Surely You desire truth in the inner parts. (Psalm 51:6)

Lesson

The last two weeks we've been learning about the early Christians. First, we learned how the Holy Spirit filled the believers and they began to speak in other languages so that everybody could know

about Jesus. Then, we learned about how the Holy Spirit gave Peter and John the power to heal the lame man. Today we're going to find out that even though the Holy Spirit had come and given the people special powers and gifts, they were not protected from Satan's temptations. And, Satan is still actively trying to make believers stumble.

Acts 4:32-35

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. (33) The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God's great blessing was upon them all. (34) There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them (35) and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.

The early Christians were so excited to know the truth about Jesus and God's love for them that they wanted to live together like one big happy family. The scriptures say, "*All the believers were in one heart and mind.*" This enabled them to share possessions and property. No one went hungry or was in need.

None of these Christians felt that what they had was their own, so they were able to give and share.

How do you feel about your things? Is it easy for you to share what you have with others? We need to remember that everything we have comes as a gift from God!

Acts 5:1

But there was a certain man named Ananias who, with his wife, Sapphira, sold some property.

This was a voluntary decision. If believers did choose to sell something they owned, the money was theirs to use as they wanted. But Ananias and Sapphira desired praise. They wanted to appear to be generous. So, they made a plan to lie...

Acts 5:2-6

He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount. With his wife's consent, he kept the rest. (3) Then Peter said, "Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself. (4) The property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished. And after selling it, the money was also yours to give away. How could you do a thing like this? You weren't lying to us but to God!" (5) As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died. Everyone who heard about it was terrified. (6) Then some young men got up, wrapped him in a sheet, and took him out and buried him.

Meanwhile, his wife didn't know what had happened to her husband...

Acts 5:7-10

About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. (8) Peter asked her, "Was this the price you and your husband received for your land?" "Yes," she replied, "that was the price." (9) And Peter said, "How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this? The young men who buried your husband are just outside the door, and they will carry you out, too." (10) Instantly, she fell to the floor and died. When the young men came in and saw that she was dead, they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

What was Ananias' and Sapphira's sin? Was it stinginess? Greed? Covetousness? No, it was their choice whether or not to sell their land and how much to give. No, their sin was lying! Saying they gave the whole amount and trying to make people think they were more generous than they really were.

Have you ever lied so that others will think you are special? Have you ever pretended to be good in ways you really aren't so you'll look good? Have you ever bragged about yourself to make people like you? That's being a hypocrite.

[Teacher, write "*hypocrite*" on the board.] The word *Hypocrite* is a Greek word for "*stage actor*." That's why we use this word to describe someone who pretends to be what he is not. Greek hypocrites (actors) used to wear masks to play out their parts.

What are some hypocritical things people sometimes do in church? (Pretend to be big tithers, prayers, etc.)

When you are a hypocrite, a play actor, you may be able to fool some people with lies, but God is not fooled! He knows what you are really like inside. Don't think you can deceive God and escape His discipline.

Galatians 6:7 says,

Don't be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.

Why do you think God judged Ananias and Sapphira's dishonesty so harshly? All lying is bad, but it is especially destructive in a church. It prevents the Holy Spirit from working effectively. When we lie to try to deceive people about our righteousness, we destroy our testimony about Christ.

God hates lying. If you lie you have no part with Jesus. The Bible says that Satan is the father of lies.

John 8:44

For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies.

God expects you to be truthful.

Object Lesson

[Teacher, give each child a lemon wedge and a gumdrop.]

Have you ever told a lie? Or, has anyone ever lied to you? How did it make you feel? Lying makes our heart attitude sour.

To demonstrate this, each time I say something untrue, lick the lemon. When I say something true, lick the candy. Here goes:

- The sky is purple and green.
- God knows when we're dishonest.
- Two plus four equals twenty.
- Kangaroo live in the ocean.
- God loves us.
- God wants us to be honest.
- Truth is sweet and good. [Let the children finish their gumdrops.]

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, help us to always be truthful with You and with others. And, help us to be honest in everything we do. We also ask You to help us to be generous with the things You have given us. Don't let me hold back from sharing with others, as Ananias and Sapphira did. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Learning Centers

Craft Corner

Game Center

Use the following questions in a discussion:

Discussion questions:

1. When have you lied or had someone lie to you?
2. Did anyone know you lied? How did you feel?
3. What happens when we're not honest?
4. Why do you think honesty is important to God?
5. Does God always know if you're truthful? Explain.
6. Discuss how dishonesty is like a trap: one lie often leads to more, and before you know it, the lies have taken over.

The Apostles are Persecuted

(Acts 5:14-42)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, discuss persecution in terms the children will relate to...] Has anyone been mean to you because you are a Christian? Has anyone ever made fun of you because of what you believe? Has anyone ever laughed at you because you wanted to do the "right" thing? Has anyone tried to make you feel weird for not wanting to laugh at a dirty joke or join in a mean trick? Do other children make fun of you, laugh at you, call you names, or even hit you when you try to tell them about the Lord Jesus? Have you ever been left out of an activity because you've let others know you believe in Jesus? That is called "*persecution*." To be persecuted means to be treated with meanness or cruelty because of what you believe.

The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12, "*All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" This is a promise! You can expect it to happen sometime in your life. Today's lesson is about a time when Peter and John were persecuted for telling others about Jesus.

Opening Prayer

Father, persecution is NOT something I look forward to, but I do pray that I am bold enough in my walk with you that other people know that I am a Christian. Give us the courage to tell others that Jesus is the only way to be saved, even if we are persecuted. Today as we study Your word, show us how we are to live out our lives in such a way that others will want to know You better. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (Matthew 5:11)

Lesson

The last three weeks we've been learning about the early Christians. First, we learned how the Holy Spirit came down upon the believers like tongues of fire and they began to speak in other languages so that everybody could know about Jesus. Then, we learned about how the Holy Spirit gave Peter and John the power to heal the lame man. Next, we learned that even though the Holy Spirit had come and given the people special powers and gifts, they were not protected from Satan's temptations. Ananias and Sapphira were tempted by Satan to lie. Today we learn that just as people hated Jesus and wanted to kill Him when He was here on earth, so people hated the early Christians, like Peter and John, who were continuing to tell people about Jesus.

Peter and John taught that Jesus is God and many people became believers. The religious rulers were jealous and tried to stop them. But, the apostles kept preaching and God confirmed their message with great signs and wonders doing miracles of healing among the people. And, more and more people turned to the Lord.

Acts 5:14-16

Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord—crowds of both men and women. (15) As a result of the apostles' work, sick people were brought out into the streets on beds and mats so that Peter's shadow might fall across some of them as he went by. (16) Crowds came from the villages around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those possessed by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

When the religious rulers saw that Jesus, even though He was not here physically among the living, was still drawing people away from following them, they threw Peter and John back in jail.

Acts 5:17-18

The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. (18) They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail.

Then, something amazing happened that night!

Acts 5:19-20

But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, (20) "Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!"

Woe! That must have been a surprise for Peter and John to suddenly be brought out of prison by an angel! The prisons in those days were highly secure. Peter and John, no doubt, had their ankles and wrists chained to the wall. And, the guards knew that the penalty for letting a prisoner escape was death, so they guarded the prison with their lives! There's no way out of those dungeons. But suddenly Peter and John found themselves with an angel who was telling them to go back to the Temple and tell people about Jesus! Their heads must have been spinning!

Peter and John knew that if they began to tell people about the risen Savior they would surely be persecuted — whipped, beaten, spit upon, and certainly sent back to prison. If you had been Peter or John what would you have done? Would you have said, "You *must* be crazy! I'm not going out there! I'm out of here!"? What did Peter and John do?

Acts 5:21a [Teacher, read only the first sentence...]

So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.

Peter and John were so excited about the Lord, they couldn't wait to tell everybody about Jesus! They went to the Temple first thing in the morning! Like Peter and John, we should be so excited to tell others about Jesus that you don't care if people persecute you.

[Teacher, review today's memory verse.] To be "*blessed*" means to be "*joyful on the inside*." But how can you have joy inside when others are treating you badly? Realize that Jesus understands what you're going through because He suffered much more than you.

Remember that your persecution can help to make you more like the Lord Jesus. Keep in mind that the one persecuting you — or others that might be watching — may come to know the Lord through your witness. Remind yourself that God has promised to reward you in heaven if you remain faithful in spite of persecution. Instead of being discouraged, you can actually be joyful on the inside when others persecute you or say untrue things about you because you talk about Jesus. The apostles knew they might be persecuted, but they also knew that God wanted them to tell others that only Jesus could save them.

Meanwhile, the religious rulers didn't know that Peter and John were teaching in the Temple, so they got together and went to the prison to get them.

Acts 5:21b [Teacher, read the rest...]

When the high priest and his officials arrived, they convened the high council—the full assembly of the elders of Israel. Then they sent for the apostles to be brought from the jail for trial.

Let's see what happened when the Temple guards went to the prison.

Acts 5:22-23

But when the Temple guards went to the jail, the men were gone. So they returned to the council and reported, (23) "The jail was securely locked, with the guards standing outside, but when we opened the gates, no one was there!"

The prison doors were locked and guarded, but the prison was empty!

Acts 5:24-25

When the captain of the Temple guard and the leading priests heard this, they were perplexed, wondering where it would all end. (25) Then

someone arrived with startling news: "The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple, teaching the people!"

So they all went to the Temple...

Acts 5:26-28

The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. (27) Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. (28) "We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name!" he said. "Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!"

It's interesting that the high priest and the captain of the Temple didn't ask how they got out of prison! They were more concerned about trying to keep Peter and John from telling any more people about Jesus. They didn't believe in Jesus' resurrection and didn't want to hear about it. Nor did they want to hear that they had been responsible for Jesus' death. But Peter and John weren't afraid of what the high priest and the captain of the Temple could do to them.

Peter is then filled with the Holy Spirit and speaks out boldly...

Acts 5:29

But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

God wants us to obey rules that people set for us except when they tell us to disobey God. Then we must obey God and be willing to pay the penalty human rules demand. [Teacher, lead a discussion about this with the children.]

When the religious rulers heard Peter preach, they went crazy!

Acts 5:33

When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them.

Fortunately, there was one religious ruler that had godly wisdom!

Acts 5:34-35

But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. (35) Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men!"

Gamaliel told the other council members that they better be careful what they do with Peter and John.

Acts 5:38-40

"So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. (39) But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!" (40) The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go.

Beaten and warned not to talk about Jesus, the apostles were set free. But that didn't stop them from spreading the good news about Jesus.

Acts 5:41

The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.

God did not keep the apostles from persecution, but He did give them courage as they suffered. God tells us that we, too, may be persecuted if, as Christians, we speak for Him (2 Timothy 3:12). But God can give you courage to tell others about what Jesus did for us on the cross, even if you are persecuted. If you know it is the truth, nothing should stop you!

Do not let persecution discourage you; instead do as Jesus instructed us...

Matthew 5:44

But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!

When someone makes fun of you or laughs at you, show love to him instead of acting as he does. If someone curses you, saying mean things or calling you names, bless him, that is, answer him kindly. Then compliment him for something he does well. Let God show His love to them through you. Pray for those who are unkind to you; ask God to give you courage to continue telling them about Jesus. They may begin to listen to what Jesus can do for them and trust Him as their Savior if you carefully share with them. You may face persecution, but don't be discouraged. Be Joyful; remember, God promises that your reward in heaven will be great (Matthew 5:11). The apostles were not discouraged even though they had been beaten. God gave them courage and joy in their suffering.

Acts 5:42

And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah."

The apostles left rejoicing that they were worthy to suffer for Jesus!

Closing Prayer

Father, we pray that nothing will discourage us from telling people about You. Help us to remember that everyone is born a sinner and in need of a Savior. If we don't tell people about You, they may never hear about Your wonderful plan of Salvation. Fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit like you did Peter and John so that we might have the courage we need to be bold for You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Question Matching

Write questions and their answers on separate cards. Place the answers around the room. Split the class into two teams. Taking turns, pull a question card from a bag. Let the team find the answer. A right answer is worth 500 points. If they can't find the answer, let the other team try to find it. Team with most points wins.

Or, use the following review questions in a discussion or another game of your choice:

1. What does it mean to be persecuted? (To be treated with cruelty.)
2. Has anyone ever tried to make you feel weird for being a Christian?
3. Can you be happy when someone makes fun of you for doing good? (God says you can.)

4. Why did the religious rulers persecute Peter and John?
(Because they were jealous of their popularity.)
5. What did the religious rulers do to Peter and John? (They threw them into prison.)
6. What amazing thing happened to Peter and John when they were in prison? (An angel brought them out.)
7. What scary thing did the angel tell Peter and John to do? (Go speak about Jesus, the very thing that got them sent to prison in the first place.)
8. If you had been Peter and John, would you have started preaching to people about Jesus again, knowing you could be sent back to prison?
9. What did Peter and John do? Did they obey the angel or not?
(They went to the Temple first thing in the morning! They were so excited to tell others about Jesus they didn't care if they were persecuted.)
10. What laws or rules are OK not to obey? (One's that tells us to disobey God. Then we must obey God and be willing to pay the penalty human rules demand.)
11. What did the religious rulers do when they heard Peter preach?
(They went crazy! They were furious and made plans to kill him.)
12. What are you supposed to do if someone makes fun of you or laughs at you? (Show them love instead of acting just like them. Answer them kindly. Let God show His love to them through you. Pray for those who are unkind to you.)

Saul Becomes A Believer

(Acts 9:1-22)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, have an adult dressed like Saul and carrying scrolls come storming into the class room saying, *"My name is Saul, and I have letters giving me permission to arrest those who believe in Jesus. I can't imagine how anybody could believe that He is really the Son of God and that He actually came back to life from the dead. These believers are causing nothing but trouble. They must be stopped!"* Saul continues grumbling as he leaves the class room.]

How frightening it must have been for the believers in the early church to have to face someone like Saul!

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that we live in a free country where we can freely worship You and study Your word. So, many Christians in the world today have to meet in secret, fearing for their lives! But we can walk down the street with our Bibles; we can talk about You openly; we can have Christian concerts in public parks. Help us never to take this privilege for granted, Lord. Help us to be bold witnesses for You and take advantage of our freedom to tell people about You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Lesson

Last week we learned that Peter and John were persecuted and thrown into prison for telling others about Jesus. Jesus' followers in Jerusalem suffered dreadful persecution. One of the chief persecutors was a man named Saul. Saul had stood by and

watched men stone Stephen to death. Stephen was the first Christian to be killed for his faith in Jesus.

Wherever Saul went he uttered murderous threats against the followers of Jesus. How he hated them! From house to house he went, dragging out the believers and having them thrown into jail and put to death without good cause.

Hundreds of Christians fled from the city, but Saul was determined to track them down. When he heard that some of them had traveled 150 miles away to Damascus, he set off with troops to drag them back in chains. He was determined to wipe out Jesus' followers there, too. But God had other plans for him!

Open your Bibles to Acts 9 where we pick up the account right after Stephen had been stoned to death.

Acts 9:1-2

Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. (2) He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

Saul went to the high priest for letters that would grant him authority to arrest believers in Damascus and have them taken back to Jerusalem to be put in prison.

Saul was a Pharisee. He knew the teachings of the Old Testament well. He thought he was pleasing God by trying to eliminate Christians! He did not believe that Jesus is God or that He had risen from the dead. He punished Jesus' followers because he thought they were teaching things against what he understood the Bible to teach. He was being zealous for righteousness, but he didn't know the truth about God.

As Saul traveled along the road to Damascus, something incredible happened.

Acts 9:3-4

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. (4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

Saul and his men had nearly reached Damascus when suddenly, at about midday, there was a blinding flash of light in the sky and the Lord spoke to him and he fell to the ground.

Acts 9:5

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"

In this dramatic moment, Saul believed that Jesus is the Christ, the One God had promised in the scriptures to send to save everyone from their sins. God wanted Saul to see that Jesus had truly risen from the dead and met him on the road in this spectacular way!

Even though Saul had persecuted and even ordered Christians to be put to death, because of God's great love for Saul, God showed him that Jesus really is alive! God wants to do that for every human being that ever lived. God is full of mercy and grace. He doesn't want any to perish and go to hell. He wants all people to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus! And, he goes to great lengths to get everybody's attention! No one is without excuse for not coming to believe in Jesus!

Acts 9:6-7

Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (7) The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one!

Saul was blinded by the light.

Acts 9:8-9

Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. (9) He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

Saul's soldiers probably saw him stagger to his feet. They had to lead him like a blind man to Damascus. After three days, God sent help.

Acts 9:10-12

Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. (11) The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to me right now. (12) I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."

What do you think was going through Ananias' mind at this point? He was probably awe struck by having a vision of the Lord speaking to him; it's not every day we have an actual conversation with the Creator of the universe! Also, he was probably afraid to face Saul because he had a bad reputation for persecuting the believers. Ananias was probably terrified.

Acts 9:13-16

"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! (14) And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." (15) But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. (16) And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."

What would you have done if you had been Ananias? It must have been hard, but Ananias was obedient to the Lord and went to Saul. We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

Acts 9:17-19

So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (18) Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. (19) Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days.

That day, Saul's body received a healing and his mind received a healing as well. As the scales fell from his eyes, Saul was able to see both physically and spiritually. As a sign of his conversion, Saul was baptized and began his new life as God's chosen apostle.

God had sent Ananias to encourage Saul and give him exciting news. Ananias told this new believer about the special plans that God had for his life.

God has special plans for your life, too. God promises to lead us and guide us every day. He will direct our steps if we just ask Him to show us the way and trust that His way is the best for us.

Saul, now a believer, is full of the Holy Spirit and begins to boldly preach the good news about Jesus, how He came and died for our sins, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

Acts 9:20-22

And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" (21) All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" (22) Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

People knew that what Saul taught was real because they could see it in the way he lived. He had a changed life.

What a strange twist of fate for Saul, who set out to destroy Christianity, to suddenly become the most well-known of all God's apostles. Did you know that most of the New Testament was written by this same man, whose name was changed from Saul to Paul?

In His sovereignty, God can take even the most hateful of all people and turn him around for His own good purposes! [Teacher, review today's memory verse.]

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, You are so good and so full of mercy and grace. You took this man, Saul, who was persecuting and even killing people who believed in You, and you changed him from the inside out. You loved him, even when he was a murderer and a hater, and you used him in a mighty way to teach people about your grace. Help us to be as loving and forgiving of others as You are with us! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES**CRAFT CORNER****GAME CENTER**

Opposition to the Faith game

Preparation: You'll need several colors of sidewalk chalk, marbles, two basketballs, and Bibles.

In your church parking lot, use the sidewalk chalk to draw two large targets with at least four rings. Make the targets 10 to 20 feet in diameter and label each bull's eye "Jerusalem." Then label each circle outside of Jerusalem with a point value, increasing as they go farther out (10 points between Jerusalem and the first ring, 20 points between the first and second rings, and so on).

Note: Scale this game down for play indoors!

Play: Form two teams and have them each stand near a target. Give each team a basketball and 20 marbles to place on its bull's eye. Team members will take turns throwing the basketball on Jerusalem, scattering the marbles throughout the target. After each turn, add points up based on where in the target the marbles are have rolled. Then the marbles are gathered and returned to the center of the target for the next person to scatter.

Tell the kids that the object is to have as many marbles as possible land outside of Jerusalem. Add up the points for each person on a team. Marbles landing outside the target count for 50 points each. After tallying the scores, declare the winning team.

Next have kids each choose a partner from the opposing team to form pairs. Have one partner in each pair read aloud Acts 8:1-4 and the other summarize it in one sentence. Then ask:

1. How was the persecution of the early church like this game?
2. In what way did the persecution help to spread the news of Jesus to remote areas of the earth?
3. How do you think the early Christians felt about their persecution? Explain.
4. What can we learn about how God works from this example of the early church?

God Delivers Peter from Prison

(Acts 12:1-19)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Object Lesson on the Power of Prayer:

Spread a blanket on the floor. Have children stand around the edges of the blanket without touching it. Have an adult or large child lie on the blanket, then say, "Let's see if any of you can carry the person on the blanket by yourself." Let one or two children try to lift the blanket and carry the person. Then say, "Carrying someone on a blanket isn't easy to do by yourself. But what happens when lots of people join in? Let's see!" Encourage everyone to hold an edge of the blanket, gently lift the person, and carry him or her a few feet across the room. Say, "See? When we all join together, we're stronger!" Gently set the blanket and the person down.

Say, "When we work together, great things happen. Prayer is just like that. When lots of people pray together, wonderful things happen."

Today we're going to find out how God answered prayers in a miraculous way when things looked completely hopeless to them.

Opening Prayer

Father, teach us this morning the importance and the power of prayer. Make us prayer warriors. Help us to have total confidence in Your ability to help us even in hard times. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16 NIV)

Lesson

During the past few weeks we have been learning about life for the first Christians that lived right after Jesus ascended into Heaven. At that time people were persecuted for believing in Jesus.

The Romans had appointed Herod to be the king in Jerusalem. He wanted to do all he could to please the Jewish priests and rulers. He knew that Jews hated Jesus' followers and were treating them very bad. So, Herod put James (the apostle) into prison and later had him killed with a sword. Because he saw this pleased the Jewish leaders, Herod also put Peter in prison and was no doubt planning to kill him right after the Passover feast.

Acts 12:1-4

About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. (2) He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. (3) When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) (4) Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover.

Under Roman law, guards who allowed a prisoner to escape were subject to the same punishment the prisoner was to receive. So you know that Peter was in prison, guarded securely by these 16 soldiers.

Peter was being treated unfairly by the king who was against Christians. Today in many places around the world Christians still suffer and are mistreated because they love the Lord and want to serve Him.

Have you ever been persecuted because you are a Christian? [Teacher, let the children respond.] If you ever take a stand at school against something you know the Lord disapproves of (e.g., evolution or abortion), your teacher or classmates may give you a hard time.

God allows hard times to come into our lives. He doesn't protect us from difficult times because He knows that our faith grows when we go through trials. James 1:2-4 tells us that "*the testing of your faith*

produces patience." Patience is the ability to go through hard times calmly and pleasantly. When you are being persecuted, God is working to make your faith stronger so that others will see the Lord Jesus in your life. As a result, you will grow in the Lord and His name will be glorified. Knowing this, you should have confidence in God even in hard times. God allowed Peter to be put in prison unjustly for a special purpose.

Acts 12:5

But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him.

Herod's plan undoubtedly was to execute Peter, but the believers were praying for Peter's safety. [Teacher, review the Memory Verse!] Prayer changes things! The believers offered constant fervent prayer for Peter even though the possibility of rescuing him from Herod seemed hopeless. This is an example of how we should pray for others who are going through difficult times.

The night before he was to be tried, Peter calmly slept.

Acts 12:6

The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate.

Peter undoubtedly knew of Herod's intent to put him to death, yet he showed complete trust in God in the midst of trouble and calmly went to sleep. Could you do that? Peter knew that God is in control of every situation. That is why he could peacefully sleep in prison during this hard time.

Peter didn't know that something exciting was about to happen!

Acts 12:7-10

Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. (8) Then

the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. (9) So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. (10) They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him.

Some pretty amazing stuff was happening here! Peter's chains fell off, they walked right by two sets of guards, then the iron gate opened of its own accord! Peter didn't know if this was real or if he was dreaming this!

Acts 12:11

Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

Peter immediately realized that God had delivered him! God had done a miracle! No doubt Peter was praising and thanking God. Peter's faith in God would certainly be much stronger now because he had experienced God's help in a difficult situation. If Jesus is your Savior, you should have confidence in God even in hard times.

The Bible says in Psalm 56:3, "*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.*" When you are treated unfairly or even persecuted, you can know God has allowed it for your good. You must trust in God alone and know that He is working in all things — good and bad, easy and hard, happy and sad. He's the One who will make things work out for good. God is sovereign: He is in control and can do anything. He certainly proved that to Peter by freeing him from prison in such a miraculous way.

Acts 12:12-15

When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. (13) He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it.

(14) When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" (15) "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel."

The disciples didn't believe Rhoda that Peter was at the door! Even though they had been praying earnestly, they were surprised when God answered their prayer!

Acts 12:16

Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.

They couldn't believe their eyes!

Acts 12:17-19

He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place. (18) At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter. (19) Herod Agrippa ordered a thorough search for him. When he couldn't be found, Herod interrogated the guards and sentenced them to death. Afterward Herod left Judea to stay in Caesarea for a while.

Can you imagine what the other believers did when they heard how God had delivered Peter from prison? They no doubt realized the power of prayer, understood that God is all-powerful, and gave thanks to God. Seeing God work in this hard situation in such a great way, strengthened their faith, gave them joy, and renewed their courage. They continued to go through more persecution, but now their trust in God was stronger.

If Jesus is your Savior you should trust in God, too. If you're going through a trial, instead of getting angry, worried, or upset, you can trust Him for quietness and peace on the inside. Remember, He is with you every minute and will cause everything to turn out for good. Talk to God, ask Him to give you peace about the situation and trust that He will make everything work out for the best.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for giving us the gift of prayer. We're glad You hear every prayer. Please help us to remember to pray. Make us prayer warriors. Help us to have total confidence in Your ability to help us even in hard times. Thank You, God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CRAFT CORNER

GAME CENTER

Use the following review questions in a discussion.

1. Why did God allow James to be killed with the sword and yet miraculously save Peter? (Acts 12:2)

Life is full of difficult questions like this. Why is one child physically disabled and another child athletically gifted? These are questions we cannot possibly answer in this life because we do not see all that God sees. He has chosen to allow evil in this world for a time. But we can trust God's leading because he has promised to destroy all evil eventually. In the meantime, we know that God will help us use our suffering to strengthen us and glorify Him. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.

2. Why do you think Peter was able to sleep when he knew Herod was planning to kill him the next day? (Acts 12:6)

Look up John 21:18. Peter had Jesus' promise that he would live to an old age. God always keeps His promises. Peter knew God is in control of every situation. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.

3. Even though the possibility of rescuing Peter from Herod seemed hopeless, what did the believers do? (Acts 12:5)

They prayed. Prayer changes things, so you should pray often and with confidence. You can have confidence in God even in hard times.

4. Why did the believers think Rhoda was out of her mind? (Acts 12:15)

They didn't believe it was really Peter! The prayers of the group of believers were answered, even as they prayed. But when the answer arrived at the door, they didn't believe it. We should be people of faith who believe that God answers our prayers. When you pray, believe you will get an answer. And when the answer comes, don't be surprised; be thankful. Remember our Memory verse, James 5:16.

5. In verse 17, Peter tells the believers to "*Go tell these things...to the brethren.*" Can you imagine what the other believers did when they heard how God had delivered Peter from prison?

They no doubt realized the power of prayer, understood that God is all-powerful, and gave thanks to God. Seeing God work in this hard situation in such a great way strengthened their faith, gave them joy and renewed their courage. So you should always share with others the great things that God does for you! It will encourage people to put their trust in God, even in hard times.

Paul and Silas Rejoice in Prison

(Acts 16:16-40)

Pre-Session Warm Up

How do you react to hard or difficult times? Do you get angry? Do you lash out and say unkind things? Do you take out your frustration by being miserable or disobedient? Do you pout and feel sorry for yourself? [Teacher, let the children discuss.] Some people complain and even question whether or not God knows what He is doing! It doesn't help to think about your problems; it only makes them seem bigger.

As a Christian, you don't have to react in the flesh. Instead, all you need to do is think of something about God that will help you rejoice! He will give you gladness inside even when things on the outside aren't good.

Today our lesson is about a time that seemed hopeless to Paul and Silas, but they never stopped praising the Lord!

Opening Prayer

Father, when we're going through hard times, help us to take control of our thoughts. Help us to remember that You are all-powerful and in control of everything. Help us to learn this morning that You are ready and willing to give us peace and joy in the midst of our trials, if only we would truly learn to trust that You have our best interests in mind and that You will not allow us to go through anything that's too difficult to handle. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

Lesson

During the past few weeks we have been learning about life for the early Christians, those that lived right after Jesus ascended into Heaven. We learned that a man named Saul, who had once been a persecutor of Christians, had an encounter with the risen Lord on his way to Damascus. Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, was now a believer in the Lord Jesus and anxious to go tell everyone everywhere about the work that Jesus did for all of us on the cross.

Paul and a friend named Silas, were on a missionary trip. One day while they were walking down the street, a girl who had an evil spirit of Satan in her, made fun of them.

Acts 16:16

One day as we were going down to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit that enabled her to tell the future. She earned a lot of money for her masters by telling fortunes.

This girl's fortune-telling ability came from evil spirits. Fortune telling was a common practice in Greek and Roman culture and she made her master rich by telling people their fortunes. Her masters used her fortune telling to make money.

Acts 16:17

She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, and they have come to tell you how to be saved."

This slave girl ran after Paul and called out that Paul and Silas were servants of God who proclaimed the way of salvation. She was speaking the truth, but probably in a mocking tone of voice.

Acts 16:18

This went on day after day until Paul got so exasperated that he turned and said to the demon within her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And instantly it left her.

Paul didn't want his teaching about Jesus to be confused with fortune telling. If Paul accepted the demon's words, he would appear to be linking the truth about Jesus with demon-related

activities. Truth and evil do not mix. So, Paul commanded the evil spirit to leave her in Jesus' name. And suddenly her master's business was ruined.

Acts 16:19-21

Her masters' hopes of wealth were now shattered, so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. (20) "The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!" they shouted to the city officials. (21) "They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice."

With their business ruined, the girl's owners took Paul and Silas to the town officials and accused them of teaching against the law. Then the crowd attacked Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:22-24

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. (23) They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. (24) So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

With their backs bleeding and their feet clamped painfully into heavy wooden frames, they were surrounded by darkness. How easy it would have been for them to grumble and complain! But they didn't. God's Word says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.*" (Philippians 4:4)

To rejoice in the Lord is to be joyful or happy as you think about Him, even if you are going through hard times, like Paul and Silas were. They were locked up in prison. But they didn't complain or grumble. They were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and rejoiced in the Lord!

Acts 16:25

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.

They thought they were about to be put to death, yet they continued to praise the Lord. They didn't know a miracle was about to happen!

Acts 16:26-27

Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! (27) The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself.

Jailers in those days were put to death if their prisoners escaped. So when he thought that Paul and Silas had escaped, the jailer tried to kill himself. But Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:28

But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

When the jailer saw that the prisoners hadn't run away, he realized immediately that God had done a miracle. It was God who caused the earth to shake; it was God who opened the prison gates; it was God who loosed the prisoner's chains.

Acts 16:29-30

The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. (30) Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The jailer had heard Paul and Silas rejoicing in the Lord; now he wanted to know God in the same way, too. So, Paul told him what he had to do.

Acts 16:31

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household."

Paul and Silas didn't give the jailer a list of rules to follow in order to get saved! Paul simply told the jailer the good news about what Jesus did for us. We all deserve to be punished for the naughty

things we do. If we believe that Jesus willingly died for you and for me and gave His life's blood to pay for our sins, someday we will have eternal life with God in heaven. Paul and Silas told the jailer that he and anyone else in his family who wanted to, could believe on Jesus to save them from sin. That's the good news we need to tell everyone today, too.

Acts 16:32-33

And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. (33) Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

The jailer washed their wounds. And God turned Paul and Silas' pain to joy and victory as the jailer and his family believed in the Lord.

You may not understand why God allows you to go through hard times. Often you don't know God's purpose in allowing you to go through difficult situations. God had let Paul and Silas go through that hard time so the jailer and his family would be saved.

So, next time you face a problem, stop thinking about your problem and think about of these two "R's":

- **R**emember something good God has done for you (He saved you; He supplies your needs; He's helped you through other problems); some truth from the Bible (Jeremiah 29:11; Hebrews 13:5), or something about God (He is all-powerful; He is in control of everything; He wants what is best for you).
- **R**ejoice in the Lord: thank Him for what you remember about Him or sing a praise song to Him.

You will face many problems in this life, but you can learn to rejoice in the Lord at all time.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I pray that we will all learn to trust and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the proper perspective on the things that happen to us in this life. We pray that our attitudes will be like Paul and Silas'. Help us to remember that if we choose to have peace and joy in the midst of our trials, someone may come to know who You are. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

CRAFT CORNER

Cut a yellow circle for each child. On the front draw a smiley face and write out Philippians 4:4. On the back write these steps:

1. Remember something good God has done for you.
2. Rejoice in the Lord by thanking Him.

Encourage children to put the circle in a prominent place where they will see it each day as a reminder.

GAME CENTER

Play *Pictionary* or *Charades* using lesson themes from the past few weeks. Alternate between teams. Give one minute to guess the topic. If Team A guesses correctly they get 1,000 points. If team A doesn't guess it, but Team B does, then Team B gets 500 points.

Print the following lesson theme ideas onto playing cards:

- Ananias and Sapphira Lie
- Early Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit
- God Delivers Peter from Prison
- Paul and Silas Rejoice in Prison

- Peter and John Heal the Lame Man
- Saul Becomes a Believer

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

Review questions:

1. What can you tell me about Saul? (He was once a persecutor of Christians, but he had an encounter with the risen Lord on his way to Damascus. His name was changed to Paul and he became a missionary and went all over telling everyone everywhere about the work that Jesus did for all of us on the cross. He also wrote most of the New Testament.)
2. Why was the slave girl that followed Paul and Silas able to tell fortunes? (She had an evil spirit of Satan in her; she was possessed.)
3. What did the slave girl do for her masters? (She made them a lot of money!)
4. Why did Paul and Silas get so annoyed with the slave girl if she was actually telling the truth about them? (She was probably calling out in a mocking tone of voice, making fun of Paul and Silas. Paul didn't want the truth of God to be confused with fortune telling.)
5. What did Paul do to the evil spirit in the slave girl? (Paul commanded the evil spirit to come out of the girl.)
6. By Who's power did the evil spirit come out of the slave girl? (The power of the Holy Spirit.)
7. What happened to Paul and Silas when the slave girl's master realized his business was ruined? (They were beaten and whipped and sent into prison.)
8. What did Paul and Silas do while they were in prison with their backs bleeding and their feet clamped painfully to the wall? (They rejoiced in the Lord!)
9. What would you do if you got sent to prison for no good reason?
10. What sudden surprise happened to Paul and Silas? (There was a great earthquake, the jail doors opened, and their handcuffs dropped off.)
11. Why did the jailer almost kill himself? (He thought that Paul and Silas escaped and he knew the punishment for letting a prisoner escape was certain death.)
12. When the jailer realized that God had done a mighty miracle what did he ask Paul and Silas? ("*What must I do to be saved?*")
13. What did Paul tell the jailer to do to be saved? (Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.)
14. What does it mean *to believe* on Jesus? (To trust that when He was crucified on the cross, He took the full punishment for your sins and satisfied God's wrath against your sin.)
15. Why did God allow Paul and Silas to go through such a horrible trial? (So the jailer and his family would be saved.)
16. When you're in the midst of a trial, what can you do to get your mind off all your troubles? (**R**emember something good God has done for you and **R**ejoice in the Lord by thanking Him.)