

Lesson 4

Paul: Champion of the Gospel



Pray Together

Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooyn Surpo, Amen.

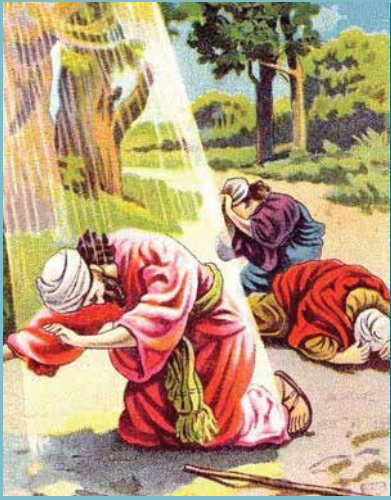
Lord, St. Paul was the greatest missionary of the Christian church. Help us be enthusiastic messengers of your word, also, sharing the Good News of life lived in you through our every action, every word, every thought. Amen.

Quick Quiz

True or False

- The Great Commission refers to the sins of Judas, the betrayer of Jesus.
- In modern times, it is perfectly safe for missionaries all over the world to speak about Jesus.
- Your everyday behavior is one way to let people know you are a follower of Jesus.
- Jonah was very happy God spared the city of Nineveh.
- Our Nicene Creed contains a statement that mentions the prophets.





Did You Know?

After Saul was stricken with blindness on the road to Damascus, God told a disciple named Ananias to find Saul so he could help restore Saul's sight. Ananias knew about Saul's reputation for harming Christians, but he trusted God and followed his instructions.

Acts 9: 10-19

Zeal, Enthusiasm, and Persistence

Saul of Tarsus, who would come to be known as Saint Paul, was a Pharisee. Pharisees were a religious sect in Judaism especially devoted to the Law and its interpretation. He made a career out of doing as much damage as he could to the early Christian church. He thought he was doing God's will by imprisoning and killing those who believed in Christ and he went about his task with much energy and enthusiasm. His name was feared by Christians throughout the region. Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen. He heartily approved of the killing of this deacon and saint.

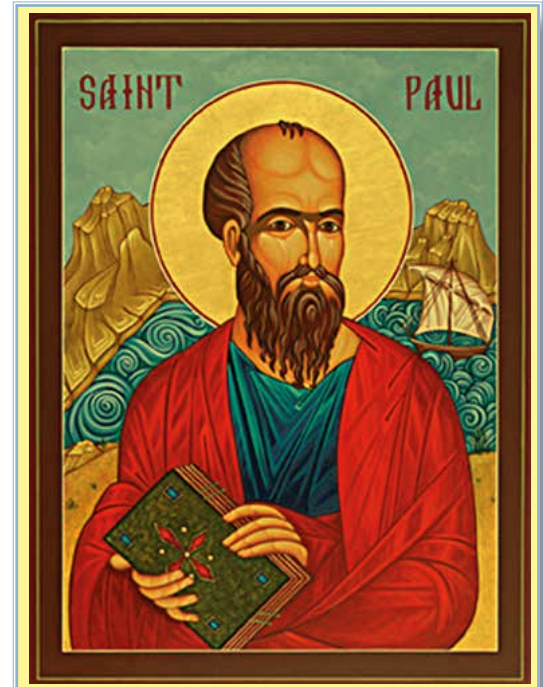
One day he decided it would be a good idea to go to Damascus and round up all Christ's followers there and bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners. By the end of that journey Paul was changed into the greatest Christian teacher and preacher of all time. Read Acts 9:3-19 to see what happened to make Paul make a 180-degree turn in his attitude toward Jesus.

After the incident on the road to Damascus, Paul immediately began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues. He had seen the Risen Christ and embraced his new mission with the same zeal he had shown in his persecutions of Christians. He never stopped teaching, even though he suffered many beatings, imprisonments, and other hardships. He was ultimately martyred in Rome.

We all have places in life where we need a complete turnaround in our behavior. What are some of those areas?

What strategies could be used to bring about a 180-degree change in these situations:

- sloppiness
- procrastinating
- laziness
- not getting along with siblings
- arguing with parents
- dealing with bullies



Content in All Things

For the rest of his life, Paul devoted himself to the preaching of the Good News. He traveled all over the region teaching and encouraging the early church. He wrote many epistles, or letters, to the different groups of believers to correct errors, plan visits, settle conflicts, and share his feelings and experiences. His epistles are lively and forcefully written, and from them we can gain a real idea of Paul's personality and true love of Jesus and his flock.

Sometimes these letters were written under terrible circumstances. Read Philippians 1:12-14 and 1:19-21 to see an example of some of Paul's difficulties, as well as his hope and faith. In Romans 5:3-5 Paul tells us "we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33. Answer the following questions:

1. How many times was Paul shipwrecked? _____
2. How did Paul escape from the prison in Damascus? _____
3. Who flogged Paul five times, each time giving him 39 lashes? _____
4. When Paul boasts that he is more of a servant of Christ than the Jews, how does he qualify this remark? _____
5. In verse 26, Paul faced danger in what four locations? _____

6. In the same verse, he faced danger from what four types of people? _____

7. Why do you think Paul boasts about his weaknesses? _____



Studies in Faithfulness – A Reader's Theatre

1. SUNDAY SCHOOL STUDENT – Homework from Sunday School. It's the last thing I want to do. Don't I have enough to do already? And what's the assignment? I have to write an essay on the importance of spreading the message of salvation in modern times. I have to do this for a celebration of Armenia's adoption of Christianity as their official religion. Wasn't that in something like the fourth century? It's all so long ago. The people don't even seem real...

2. BLIND MAN – He healed me! I've been blind for longer than I can remember, and he healed me! I had heard he could do anything, so I followed him. I wasn't really sure I believed he could do it, but once I felt myself in his presence, suddenly I knew. He asked me, "Do you truly believe I am able to do this?" I answered, "Yes, Lord," and I meant it. More than anything I've ever said in my life!

3. **PETER** – I promised Jesus I would always be there for him. I swore I would never leave him. This night, I failed him. They came and took him away, as if he were a criminal. I got scared. I followed him, but I stayed well behind. Three times, when people asked me if I knew him, I lied and said no. Three times.
4. **CENTURION** – We put a man to death here today. On that cross, right over there. I saw the whole thing. I don't think we should have done it. At the moment he died, the earth shook, and the sky turned uglier than I've ever seen it. They say the man we crucified was the Son of God. You know what? I believe he was.
5. **THOMAS** – They came and told me Jesus was alive again. I said, "I will believe it when I put my fingers in his wounds!" We were all together, and Jesus came in. He let me touch his side, and where the nails pierced his hands. You can bet I believed then! I felt ashamed, though, when he said, so gently, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."
6. **JAMES** – I have my mission. I will go wherever God sends me with the news of Jesus. The other day we were in our room upstairs, when the Holy Spirit came to us. Suddenly I and the others had tongues of fire above our heads, and we were speaking in all different languages, languages we've never understood before. We went out, and when the locals heard us, they said, "Oh they must be drunk with new wine." But how could we be drunk and speak a new language with complete accuracy, so that every traveler could hear us in his own tongue!
7. **PAUL** – I spent years doing all I could to destroy Christ's church. Then one day I was on the road to Damascus, on my way to make more mischief, when the Lord spoke to me. He asked me why I was persecuting him. Struck me blind, he did, too. Three days later he restored the sight to more than just my eyes, and now I shall spend whatever days remain to me establishing his church and teaching his message.
8. **SANTOOKHT** – I've no time! I must tell you, quickly! These gods we worship, here in Armenia - they're lifeless statues. They have no power. The power is all in Jesus Christ, the son of the Jewish God. Only he can save us from sin. Hear me, please! Thaddeus told me everything. He knew Jesus, and witnessed it all. The soldiers are coming to take me now! My own father - demanded that I choose between my God and my life - once I knew Christ, what else could I do?
9. **THADDEUS** – King Sanadrook just killed his own daughter Santookht because she loved Christ. I knew something like this would happen. When Jesus was killed, I was so frightened. I felt I had no protection from something like this happening to me. I didn't think I would have the courage to spread his message wherever he sent me. But the Holy Spirit has strengthened me, and now I feel this urgency to reach as many as I can as fast as I can, before Sanadrook or disease or whatever catches up with me. To my last breath I'll proclaim my Lord and Savior!
10. **KING SANADROOK** – These Christians are mad. They took my daughter's reason and made her renounce her gods! I had to kill her - I thought it would stop them once and for all, when they saw I was willing to put my own child to death for her blasphemy. But they won't stop. I'll finish them all. Thaddeus, Bartholomew - as many as it takes!
11. **BARTHOLOMEW** – King Sanadrook killed Thaddeus. Now I hear he's after me. I don't mind the persecution that follows me everywhere, except that it interferes with what I have to do. These poor people - worshipping statues. I wish I could smash every one of their stone idols, to show the people that their gods are nothing. But my God cannot be destroyed. And they can kill me, and everyone that God sends to replace me, and it won't change the truth. Nothing will stop this message from getting through until God decides everyone he wants to hear has been reached.

- 12. HRIPSIMÉ** – I know something dreadful will happen to me now! But I can't go and live with that wicked man. Drtad may be king, but he'll not take me away from my Lord. Why does he hate God's people so? Things are no better now than when King Sanadrook killed his own daughter. It doesn't - oh, here they come! Christ, strengthen me, please!
- 13. GAYANÉ** – I tried to help Hripsimé. I hoped to save her and all our sisters from Drtad's men, but it is not God's will. All we wanted was to live quietly away from the world, to pray and wait for our Lord's return, but it seems we are to meet him now. I hear the shouts and footsteps! Strange, I am not afraid. I long only for that reunion for which I have prayed and hoped. My only regret is for my nation - I fear it will perish in darkness.
- 14. QUEEN ASHKHEN** – My husband is a madman. For weeks he has been ill, pacing and snorting like a wild beast. The best physicians in the land have been able to do nothing for him. They're as useless as those statues before which they pray. I know what's wrong with Drtad. He has been driven mad by his bloodthirsty sin. He murdered Hripsimé, Gayané, and countless others, and he expects not to suffer for it? The only one who can help him is his own former friend Gregory, a man of great faith, whom Drtad had tortured, thrown in a pit, and forgotten. But how can I convince Drtad to seek his help without placing Gregory in further danger. And what will happen when Drtad realizes I am a believer as well?
- 15. KING DRTAD III** – I regret all the terrible things I did to Christ's people. How he is able to forgive me I'll never know or understand. That is what inspired me to love him. He loved me first, when I didn't deserve it. I am only sorry I came to him only after I did so much damage, after he healed me through Gregory. I am like the apostle Thomas, who could not believe without concrete evidence. I held myself to be wise, above all men. And I could not see what is plain to even the smallest child! But now I am preparing to declare Christianity the official faith of my land, and I will not rest until I have done all I can to bring this news to all her citizens.
- 16. PRINCESS KHOSROVITOOKHT** – It's something I never thought I'd live to see. Today, my brother, Drtad, King of Armenia, is being baptized in the Euphrates River. So many years in darkness, with my brother forcing us to hide our faith. I lived in constant fear of discovery. Drtad was uncontrollable. Anyone he associated with Christ met a horrible end. I remember what happened to Santookht. At the hands of her own father. I have no doubt Drtad would have done the same to me, and to his own queen. But the Holy Spirit cleansed my brother of his sin, and Drtad has accepted Jesus. He has vowed to carry God's truth to the entire nation.
- 17. GREGORY** – Glory to God! Our king has come to faith! Year after year I waited and prayed in my pit, sustained only by the Holy Spirit and the kindness of a stranger who fed me. I always had faith in my ultimate reunion with Christ after my death, but I was certain my days of serving him on Earth were through. I could never have imagined he would allow me to participate in this miracle, the commitment of a whole nation to his Son. Oh, thank you, my Lord and Savior. Every dark moment of imprisonment, I count it all glory to you!
- 18. ARISTAKES** – Here I am, in old age, head of the Armenian Church. My dear father, Gregory, has gone home to the Lord, and I am left with the responsibility of the faith of a nation. When I was first asked to assume some of my father's tasks, I protested. I felt I was ill-prepared to work closely among large numbers of people, because I had spent my entire life in solitary prayer and study. And I would not be honest if I didn't say I was reluctant to leave that peaceful life, but God's will be done, not mine.

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Jesus' resurrection; he rose from the grave in three days 5. Jonah was disobedient, unforgiving, and apparently unaware of the extent of God's mercy. Answers can be written on the board by students (or you can write them during the discussion). 15 min.

3. Read **The Great Commission** to the class. Conclude by discussing the question.

Sports event: being enthusiastic but courteous fans (verbal abuse of players is *not* necessary or acceptable); not littering; refreshments in moderation

Hospital emergency room: in a place of anxiety and perhaps pain - being helpful, saying a prayer for everyone there

School cafeteria where someone is being bullied; discretely calling a teacher's attention

Nursing home: visiting, putting on a talent show or skit, "adopt a grandparent"

Animal shelter: volunteering

Scene of natural disaster: providing food and water for rescue workers

Playground fight: calling for an adult to intervene

Wedding: giving a spiritual gift

At the airport during a massive flight delay: being patient; assisting others

In a public garden: weeding, picking up trash, thanking God for beautiful flowers 10 min.

4. Have the class read Jonah 2 aloud together. Guide a discussion as follows: "What is Jonah doing here from the belly of this great fish? (Praying) What was it like to have been thrown into the ocean (point out the terrifying description)? Was he grateful? (Seemed so!) What was he saying in those last 2 verses (Those who don't know this powerful God and worship worthless idols, don't know what they're missing. I get it, though, and I will do what God asked me to do). Well, let's read on and see if he does." 5 min.

5. Now have students take turns reading **Jonah, You Just Don't Get It!** and Jonah 4:9-11 aloud. "What was God really telling Jonah by asking him these questions? (I am merciful and compassionate, saved you from the belly of the fish and the heat of the sun, even though you ran away from me; yet you have not stopped complaining and you now resent my mercy towards others. You really still don't know who I am, do you?) What might this be saying to all of us? That maybe just as Jonah was a prophet by profession and we are church members with our pious habits, that it might still mean we haven't grown close enough to God to know who he truly is?" 20 min.

6. Read **Our Armenian Way**. Review by asking students to complete the sentence: "Today I learned that..." Conclude with prayer: "Thank you, Lord, for the story of Jonah and the lesson of your great mercy. Help us to remember that all who turn to you in true repentance and commit to a new way of living will be rewarded with your merciful love. Make us good messengers of your love. Amen." 5 min.

Unit Three: Sacred Living: Saints as Mentors

Lesson 4

Paul: Champion of the Gospel

Key Concepts

1. Paul turned from being one of the church's chief persecutors to her greatest missionary.
2. He bore his sufferings with good cheer for the sake of the Gospel message.
3. The story of our faith from its beginnings is the story of believers courageous in their faith.

Objectives

During this session the students will

1. Read about Paul's history and the Scripture verses describing his conversion.
2. Discuss how to generate changes in bad behaviors.
3. Examine Paul's handling of the persecution he received.
4. Explore 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 and answer questions about Paul's "boasts."
5. Participate in a "reader's theater" reading of various individuals important in the life of the church.
6. Learn about mission parishes and define two things about them.

Materials Needed

Pencils/pens

Procedure

1. Welcome the students and stand to say the opening prayer together. Have them take the **Quick Quiz**.
Answers: F (in the Great Commission – Matthew 28: 16-20 – Jesus instructs his disciples to make disciples of all people), F (Christian missionaries are persecuted even today), T, F (Jonah was furious that the Ninevites had been forgiven), T 5 min.
2. Read **Zeal, Enthusiasm, and Persistence** and the embedded Bible verse (Acts:3-19) aloud. Discuss the questions. Some guidelines: procrastinating (prayer, thinking about why you procrastinate, planning, breaking down tasks, making lists), laziness (prayer, spending just ten minutes at a time doing a task you don't like, breaking down arduous tasks into more doable components), not getting along with siblings (prayer, talking things over, making agreements about things that bother you, spending more time with them), arguing with parents (prayer, learning to listen and be respectful, doing your share, talking things over), dealing with bullies (prayer, talking with teachers and parents about the problem). 10 min.
3. Read **Content in all Things** to the class, and allow them time to read the embedded Bible verses. When they have finished, have them read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 and answer the accompanying questions. The answers are: 3 (v. 25), lowered in a basket (v. 32-33), the Jews (v. 24), says he must be out of his mind (v. 23), rivers, city, country, the sea (v. 26), bandits, his own countrymen, Gentiles, false brothers (v. 26), to show God's strength or similar response. You may have the students work alone, or in pairs or small groups. 10 min.
4. Have the students arrange their chairs in a circle. Tell them they will go around and read the parts in **Studies in Faithfulness - A Reader's Theatre**. Encourage them to read with expression. If another group is available to listen, invite them into your classroom. Or, have students rehearse and then perform it for another class. 30 min.
5. Read **Our Armenian Way** to the students. Ask for volunteers to complete "I learned that...." from this reading alone. Dismiss the class with a prayer. 3 min.