

Paul's Race

God's Grace



- Great for church school or VBS
- Five large group sessions
- Five small group sessions for Kindergarten-Grade 3 and Grades 4-8
- Five original dramas
- Large selection of crafts and activities
- Complete—no other resources to buy

LEADER'S GUIDE K-8 SUMMER BOOK 5

Paul's Race God's Grace



Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Walk With Me

Grades K-8

Summer, Book 5: Paul's Race, God's Grace

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How to Use This Book

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

—Acts 20:24

God’s grace flows through the book of Acts. Right from the beginning, we read about the gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, and throughout we see God’s grace evident in the life of Paul. After Paul was converted, he became a faithful servant, working hard to spread the news of Jesus’ death and resurrection to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Paul viewed his sharing of the good news as a race, one that he would run by the grace of God who would meet all his needs. The five stories about Paul in this course will challenge us to run the race too and to experience God’s grace at work in our own lives.

Goal and Theme

The unique format of this five-session course allows you to use it as a lively and exciting curriculum for your summer church school or for an entire week of summer ministry such as vacation Bible school (see pp. 7-8 for helpful tips).

Whether you choose a church school or summer ministry setting, the goal of this course is to teach children five stories about Paul’s life. We pray that leaders, children, and all who participate in the sessions and in the summer celebration program will come to know more about God’s love for us offered so freely through Jesus. To help meet this goal, one main theme will shine brightly throughout the session plans: God wants us to run the race of grace and share these stories and the good news of Jesus Christ with everyone—not only our family and friends, but everyone! Like Paul, we can trust God to give us everything we need to run this race.

To support our theme, this book offers a variety of ideas and options for large group sessions, small group sessions, and a summer celebration program. Use the ideas and options that work best with your church school or summer ministry. Ideally, the large group session would take about 15-20 minutes, after which kids break into their small group sessions for 30-40 minutes. You may also want to schedule an extra practice time or two if your church is planning to host the summer celebration program.

Finding time to do everything in this book will not be possible—or even desirable—for most churches. You will need to choose what your group will be able to handle in the time you have available. Be sure to purchase one copy of this book for each of your leaders. As purchaser of this book you are granted permission to photocopy the dramas (pp. 117-136) and patterns and activities (reproducible pages 157-245).

Getting Started

Because these materials suggest a different format and approach than the regular *Walk With Me* units, you’ll want to spend some extra time planning and preparing to teach these sessions. Although each church situation is unique, you may find some of the following suggestions helpful:

- In early spring, organize a small team to read through this book. They can review the session plans, dramas, and songs, then choose what they think will work best for your church.
- After the committee makes its recommendations, recruit teachers, song leaders, accompanists, and drama participants.
- Recruit volunteers who are willing to gather materials for these special sessions. Give them plenty of time for this task (a month or two) since they will likely want to ask the congregation to save and/or gather some of the items.
- Schedule rehearsals for the drama team.
- If you’re planning to use the summer celebration program, schedule a single, final rehearsal for everyone involved in the program.

Large Group Sessions and Summer Celebration Program

The large group session materials include a drama for each week and a list of songs to learn as a whole group. Presenting a drama may, at first, sound intimidating, but these dramas are written in such a way that children as well as adults will enjoy performing and/or viewing them. Each drama will take about eight to ten minutes and requires five to eight actors (more actors are optional). The costumes may be as simple or elaborate as you would like.

You'll probably want middle school kids or a team of older teens to play these roles (although adults would be fine too). Each drama offers ways to include younger children in non-speaking roles as well, if you wish to do so. Please see session 1 for more information.

The dramas and songs can be used for each large group session and also for the summer celebration program. You'll find a sample program along with ideas for organizing and producing it on pages 9-11.

Small Group Sessions

Small group sessions will give you the opportunity to help apply the story to the children's lives. If you are unable to present the story as a drama in the large group setting, you can still use the drama or another form of the story in the small group setting. It's a story you want children to hear!

Each small group opens with a Hello step designed to catch the children's interest and get them thinking about the lesson's theme.

Next comes the Know step (telling the story). If the children have already heard the story in the large group session, you'll want to use this time to review the story with them. If you did not participate in a large group session, either use the drama or another interesting way to present the story to the group (see sessions for suggestions).

The Grow step will help children understand what the story means for their lives, and the Show step will guide them to respond to what they learned in this session.

Each small group session includes options for activities and crafts. You'll want to carefully consider these well ahead of time. Once you've decided which crafts and activities to use, you may want to appoint two or more volunteers (possibly parents of children in the group) to gather materials, cut out patterns, and assemble the items you'll need. You'll also appreciate having a helper in the classroom when doing crafts and other activities with young children.

We trust that God will use you as you tell how God's grace sustained Paul in his race to share the good news about Jesus everywhere he went. And may you too experience God's grace as you run and tell.



Small group leaders may want to send a short letter to the families of the kids in their group at the beginning of this unit. Explain what these five sessions will be like, and invite families to share in the experience by praying for you, talking about the stories with their kids, helping out in your sessions, and/or attending the final celebration program (if you plan to have one).

Tailoring Your Sessions to the Ways Children Learn

How do children and young teens learn? The answer to that question can be almost as varied as the kids in your group. Some learn best through words, others through music; still others through nature or through movement.

Sessions in the *Walk With Me* curriculum try to respect the many ways kids learn. *Walk With Me* sessions include a wide range of activities that speak to kids with the following types of intelligence (based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences). Within each session, the icons below highlight the learning styles represented by each activity. As you teach, you'll begin to get a sense for how the kids in your group learn best. Kids who are



Word Smart

learn best through verbal activities (listening, reading, or speaking), including discussions, worksheets, writing, reading, storytelling, and word games.



Number Smart

learn best by exploring patterns and relationships through activities such as problem solving, logical puzzles or games, making charts and graphs, or putting things in sequence.



Picture Smart

learn best by visualizing concepts. These kids enjoy viewing maps, slides, pictures, videos, and diagrams; making jigsaw puzzles; and expressing their ideas with shape, color, and design.



Body Smart

learn best by using their bodies, acting things out, using puppets, moving—anything hands-on.



Music Smart

learn best through sound, music, and rhythm—playing musical instruments, writing their own songs and raps, listening to recordings, singing, and so on.



People Smart

learn best through doing things with others, cooperating and working in small or large groups, role playing, conversations, brainstorming, and other interactive exercises.



Self Smart

learn best by working independently through such things as writing in a journal, meditating, reading, and reflecting.



Earth Smart

learn best through activities connected to living things and natural phenomena, through nature walks, examining plants and animals, nature experiments, and activities that focus on ecology.

—The ideas on this page are based on material from the following resources: *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, © 2000, and a chart prepared by Donald L. Griggs, Livermore, California.

Tips for VBS and Other Summer Ministries

Much of this material was originally written for VBS at Westview Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, by Rev. Roger Groenboom, Alison Groenboom, and Susan Thornell. You can use the five sessions for a five-day vacation Bible school, as the authors did, or for a once-a-week session for five weeks. Below is a suggested schedule and format for using the large group/small group approach for vacation Bible school.

Opening Large Group Session (30 minutes)

- Opening prayer and singing time. Check each session for song suggestions; all songs are on the CD that accompanies this course.)
- Drama time. See pages 117-136 for dramas for each of the sessions and tips on how to present them. Purchasers of this book may photocopy all drama scripts.

Small Group Sessions (45-90+ minutes)

Small groups may spend 45 minutes or more enjoying the four steps of the session plans. Be aware that you will need to make some choices about what to use and what to ignore, especially in the Show part of each session.

- The Hello step (10 minutes) gets you started with a fun activity that introduces the theme of the story being studied.
- The Know step (10-15 minutes) gives you some great ways to review the story that was presented in the large group session.
- The Grow step (10-15 minutes) helps nurture faith as kids think about how the story affects their lives.
- The Show step (15-30 minutes) helps kids respond to the story through a variety of crafts and activities. You'll find suggestions for learning the Memory Fun or Memory Challenge and for retelling the story to others. And you'll find single session ideas for crafts, fun projects, and other activities.

Closing Large Group Session (15 minutes)

You may want to get the entire VBS back together for a time of singing and sharing. If you're planning a summer celebration program, you can use this time to review the songs that are part of that program. Kids can recite their Memory Challenge and show their crafts or other projects to the entire group. End your time together by inviting everyone to join hands for prayer.

Terrific Tees



Westview Church makes the summer program extra-special for the kids each year by ordering T-shirts printed with the program logo for all participants. (See p. 157 for a “Paul’s Race, God’s Grace” logo.) When ordered in large quantities, these T-shirts are quite inexpensive. Look for a printer in your area.

Forming Ministry Teams

Paul's Race, God's Grace provides a great opportunity for many people from your congregation to become involved in summer outreach ministry. Here are a few suggestions for setting up teams from your congregation:

- **Planning team:** Decides the dates of the program. Assists and guides the other teams so that the main theme and vision of the VBS or other outreach program is apparent.
- **Music team:** Chooses music, finds music leader and musicians, selects music for program. This material suggests a number of songs and includes them on a CD.
- **Publicity team:** Creates small fliers and distributes them throughout the neighborhood to get the word out about location, date, and theme.
- **Program team:** Organizes the celebration program and possibly an “after-program” event like an ice cream social or picnic.
- **Small group session team:** Selects the ideas that will be used for the small group sessions, especially for craft and activity time.
- **Drama team:** Recruits actors, obtains the necessary items for each drama, and presents the drama to the entire VBS. See session 1 for additional comments.
- **Decoration team:** Decorates the large group session area as desired, perhaps with large drawings of Paul and the places/events included in the five stories (use an overhead projector to trace onto shelf paper); with enlarged Memory Fun/Memory Challenge verses and the *Paul's Race, God's Grace* logo, and so on.

We encourage you to draw on the diverse gifts of members when you compose your teams. Involve as many people from the congregation as you can. Share with others your enthusiasm about the stories and how the children will respond to them.

A Summer Celebration Program

Paul's Race, God's Grace

Processional and Greeting: "Sing, Shout, Clap" (Billy Funk)

Opening Prayer

Song: "Use Me" (Linda Walker)

Memory Fun (younger children)
Philippians 1:7b

Memory Challenge (older children)
Acts 20:24

Song: "Encourage One Another" (Frank Hernandez)

Drama: "Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus" (based on Acts 9:1-22)

Congregational Song: "May the Mind of Christ, My Savior"
(Kate B. Wilkinson; Greg Scheer)

Drama: "A Jailer and His Family Join the Race" (based on Acts 16:16-34)

Song: "Earthquake" (Robert C. Evans)

Readers' Theater: "Paul Faces Trouble in Ephesus" (based on Acts 19:23-41)

Songs

"Do Not Worry" (Frank Hernandez)

"I Can Do All Things" (Frank Hernandez)

Meditation

Closing Prayer

Program Notes

Having a summer celebration program is a great way to help focus your church's attention on sharing the good news about Jesus. This program can be used during a Sunday service or for a special weeknight "bring-a-neighbor" service. Read through the sample program (previous page), and use it as a guide for creating your own unique program. You may want to use the logo on page 157 for a program cover.

Here are a few additional program ideas:

Scripture Readings

- You'll note that we've only included three of Paul's stories in the program. If you wish to include all five, you could have children who are good readers present the other two from the Bible. Consider using simplified English versions such as the New International Reader's Version or the New Living Bible. *The Message* could also be used for one or both readings.
- Children can recite their Memory Fun (younger kids) or Memory Challenge (older kids) in unison.

Songs

- We've suggested six songs for the children to sing during the program. Even if they know all the songs by the last session, you may still want to plan an extra practice session, perhaps on a Saturday or an evening. Singing a closing song during your weekly or daily sessions will also give kids time to practice the songs.
- You may want to divide the songs. For example, kids in K-3 could learn a few of the songs while kids in the other grades learn the rest. For the program, have each group sing the songs they've learned, instead of having all the kids sing together. Or have boys learn some songs and girls learn others.
- If the children make "Sing and Share Circles" in session 2, use them during the singing of "Encourage One Another" and "Earthquake." See page 41 for instructions for making the circles.
- The congregation sings "May the Mind of Christ, My Savior" between the first and second dramas. Stanza 5 of this song is especially appropriate with the theme of this course. Drums or guitars will give an extra upbeat sound to this favorite song.

Drama

- Your audience is sure to be delighted by the dramas from this course. We've included these three for the summer celebration program: "Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus," "A Jailer and His Family Join the Race," and "Paul Speaks Boldly in Ephesus." Of course, if you think one or both of the other dramas would be more effective, feel free to substitute.
- The dramas can be presented by your drama team or by other adults, young adults, and middle schoolers. We've suggested using a reader's theater format for "Trouble at Ephesus." Involve younger children in nonspeaking roles. Costumes, props, and sets can be as simple or elaborate as you like. Read through the suggestions at the beginning of each drama.

Stage Direction Ideas for the Program

- **Pre-processional:** Have the children line up in the back of the church.
- **Processional:** All of the children enter the worship space from the back of the church, running or skipping as they sing "Sing, Shout, Clap." If time permits, they can run or skip around the worship space once or twice before gathering at the front.

- **Formation in front:** Line up kids in front. They can be spread across the front of the worship space in a single row or several rows. (During practice time, assign each child an area where they will be standing during the singing time of the program.)
- **Singing:** If you are planning on having all of the children sing all of the songs, they may all stay up in front of church. (If you have steps at the front of the church, use these as risers.) If smaller groups are singing certain songs, have the others stay seated (on the steps or in front rows) until it is their turn to sing.
- **Opening prayer:** Have one of the older kids open with prayer. He or she can thank God for the Bible stories that they learned this week (or these weeks) and ask God's blessing on the program.
- **Transition to drama:** After kids sing "Encourage One Another," have them sit down on the steps or in the front rows. Have the accompanist play music during this transition time.
- **Dramas:** The drama team will need to set up and take down quickly. They may need some extra stagehands to help them. Sets and props do not have to be elaborate; perhaps they can be partially set up ahead of time. Have the accompanist play music during any transition time before and after the dramas. (Note that the congregation sings between the first and second dramas.)
- **Transition to meditation:** Sing the song "I Can Do All Things" through two times, inviting the congregation to join you the second time. The children should be seated following this song.

Optional Songs

Feel free to substitute some of the following songs for those suggested for the program. These optional songs are listed in the large group sessions and are printed at the back of this manual. They're also on the CD that accompanies this course.

- "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (Tom Colvin, arr. Jane Marshall)
- "Make Me a Servant" (Kelly Willard)
- "When I Am Afraid" (Frank Hernandez, arr. Emily R. Brink)

Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus

Scripture

Acts 9:1-22

Focus

God puts Paul on the road to following Jesus.

WORDSearch

Think About It

Before there was the apostle Paul, there was the scoundrel Saul.

If we turn back a couple of chapters from our session's story in Acts 9 to Acts 7 and 8, we run into Saul, who played no fewer than three cameo roles in the early church. First, we find Saul in the role of coat checker. Saul had the dubious privilege of keeping track of the clothes of the people who came to witness the stoning of Stephen, the church's first martyr.

Second, we see Saul in the role of cheerleader. As repulsive as Stephen's murder sounded, it surely paled in comparison to how it must have looked. But Saul is unfazed; he's a true fanatic. He gives this gruesome death his very own stamp of approval.

Third, Saul lands the role of church destroyer. Saul finds he can do more than cheer, he can conquer. Saul takes his activity up a notch. He takes matters into his own hands. Into the houses he goes, dragging Christian men and women off to prison.

To say the least, Saul is not exactly a model citizen. He is a scoundrel, someone for the church to fear and hide from. But through God's grace, Saul becomes someone for the church to embrace.

Saul the scoundrel becomes Paul the apostle.

Chapter 9 begins by reminding us just what kind of man Saul was. Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the disciples, and he was getting warrants to arrest people who followed Jesus.

Pray About It

Ring any bells? Let your prayer focus on the truth that every saved human being, including you, was once a scoundrel just like Saul. Oh, we may not have gone house to house trying to destroy the church, but we were in rebellion against God because of our own sin. At some point along the Christian race, as we mature, we all must realize this. How fitting for us to echo Paul's words to his spiritual son, Timothy: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (1 Tim. 1:15-16). With much humility and thankfulness we approach God's throne of grace, for are we not also the worst of sinners?

This is the man God has in mind to be a missionary? Can God really take a scoundrel like Saul, clean him up, and turn him into a squeaky-clean apostle? Isn't there a limit to what kind of person God can use? Shouldn't God draw the line somewhere? And if so, wouldn't Saul have been way outside the line?

Tell About It

Tell the children how amazing it is that God took Saul, a church destroyer, and turned him into Paul, a church planter. God placed Paul in the race of grace. Tell the children that God has done this for you and how thankful and humbled you are because of it.

That's what's so amazing about grace. God takes scoundrels all the time and turns them into saved sinners. The orchestra lights come shining down from heaven, Spirit and Word collide in hearts like a crash of cymbals, and God begins to play music through his brand-new, long-before chosen instrument.

Planning the Session

You are in charge of presenting the story of Paul's conversion to all the children—from kindergarten to grade 8—in your Sunday school or vacation Bible school. That's quite a challenge! During the large group session, focus on presenting a lively and interesting story about the events surrounding Paul's conversion; the interpretation of the story will happen in the small groups. The little ones in your group will understand that Paul became a friend of Jesus and wanted to tell others about him. Older kids, especially those familiar with Scripture, will realize that only God could change Paul's heart, and they'll begin to understand what God's grace to Paul and to us is all about.

The suggestions in this large group session assume that you'll be dramatizing the story about Paul's conversion to children and young teens and preparing them to respond to it in small groups. Depending on how much time you have available, you'll probably want to take 5-10 minutes for singing and another 10-15 minutes for the drama.

If you're going to be presenting a summer celebration program, you may want to use part of the large group session to help the children prepare. You'll find suggestions for program planning on pages 10-11.

Singing

You may want to ask someone with musical gifts to lead the singing and teach new songs to the children during these five sessions. Be sure to share the tips in the box "Introducing a New Song" with that person.

You'll find the songs on pages 137-156 of this book and on the CD that accompanies this course. "Sing, Shout, Clap" (track 1), a lively chorus that will get everyone involved, can serve as your theme song for the five sessions. The song "Use Me" (track 2) could have been Paul's prayer after God changed him and is a good one to introduce in this first session. Both songs are suggested for the summer celebration program.

Optional songs for this session or for the entire unit include "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" (track 8), "Make Me a Servant" (track 9), and "When I Am Afraid" (track 10). You'll also find music on pages 137-156 in this book.

If you decide to present a summer celebration program, consider dividing the songs among the children. Have kids in kindergarten-grade 3 learn some of the easier songs or just the chorus of some songs; have those in grades 4-8 sing all of the songs or just the more difficult ones.

Introducing a New Song

The way you introduce a new song is crucial. Of course you'll want to know it well yourself. But you'll also want to think through how you'll introduce it to your group. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind:

- Many kids learn mostly by rote and repetition. Listen to the CD or play the tune, and encourage the kids to join in on a line or phrase that is repeated often.
- To help kids remember the words, make up motions to go along with simple words like *step*, *Jesus*, and so on.
- Be enthusiastic! Model your love of singing instead of being concerned about your performance.



Drama

Rehearsing and presenting a drama can be a rewarding experience both for the actors and for those who view the drama. Consider finding a team of actors and begin working with them early. This could be a wonderful gift for your middle school group to offer to the younger children. Teens and adults can also be drama team members. And children of all ages can play nonspeaking roles. This week's drama, "Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus," includes eight reading parts. You could add two more speaking roles by increasing the number of Paul's followers who are out to harm the followers of Jesus. You'll also want a person to operate the spotlight.



Roger Groenboom, pastor of Westview Christian Reformed Church where this material was taught in a VBS setting, and author of the dramas in this course, says kids enjoyed watching their pastor and other teens and adults acting in the skits. "They especially enjoyed it when I goofed up the lines," says Roger. He said the team managed to "loosely" memorize their lines, improvising a bit as they went along. On the weekend before VBS began, the team rehearsed the first two dramas. Once VBS was underway, they rehearsed and learned lines in the evening.

To cut down on the time required from drama team members, consider forming two or more teams. If your drama team doesn't have time to memorize, reading the lines from scripts you provide is fine. Drama teams can still rehearse together, even though they aren't memorizing their lines.

You'll also want to begin thinking about costumes and props. Consider asking persons in the congregation (especially people who sew!) to help you out. Simple costumes and props are suggested on the first page of the script on page 117. Remember—these are only suggestions. Use what you have available and what you can find to create your own costumes. The most important props for the first drama are a sound system for the voice of Jesus and a spotlight to shine on Paul.



No time or people for drama teams? To present the dramas without rehearsal, choose your actors from the large group, distribute costumes and scripts, and walk your actors through the presentation. It won't be smooth, but it's certainly doable. You'll need to allow more time than you would for rehearsed performances by a drama team. Plan to have at least one adult "stage manager" who assigns parts, distributes costumes, and acts as a prompter to keep the action moving. It would also help to have an older teen or an adult—perhaps a small group leader—take a major role in the play. For this week's drama, ask an adult to play Paul. (You'll likely want this same person to play the part of Paul for all five weeks.)

Before presenting "Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus," ask a good reader from your middle school group to read the first part of the story from Acts 9:1-4. Introduce your drama team and invite the group to watch what happens to Paul. (To avoid confusing younger children, we suggest that you use the name *Paul* throughout the Scripture reading and drama.)

Small Groups

After the drama, children will meet in small groups. Notice that we've included two sessions plans—one for kindergarten-grade 3 and another for grades 4-8. If your regular church school leaders are present, it's probably best to have the children meet in their groups as usual; however, you could also choose to combine several groups together. Each small group leader will need to adapt the plan to the needs of his or her children.



Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus

Scripture

Acts 9:1-22

Memory Fun

Philippians 1:7b

Focus

God puts Paul on the road to following Jesus.



HELLO

Racing Shoes



Body Smart

People Smart



Word Smart

Goal

Imagine how Paul felt and acted on his way to Damascus.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

- Damascus sign (reproducible page 171)
- Scissors, masking tape
- Older children's and adult's running shoes in various sizes and styles (one pair per pair of children)
- Two flags or scarves: one red and one green

Ahead of time, clear a path around the outside of your room so that the children can walk quickly all the way around. Photocopy and cut out the Damascus sign; tape it where you wish the race to end.

As the children gather in your small group, invite them to find a partner and together select one pair of running shoes. One partner will wear the left shoe, the other will wear the right shoe. Explain that you will have a race, and have partners line up at a designated starting point until everyone is ready to race.

Remind the children that Paul, the main character in today's drama, was in a big hurry to catch the followers of Jesus. He was *racing* to Damascus when . . . (raise red flag or scarf and say

Stop!). Explain that you'll talk about the rest of the story later, but now you want them to imagine how Paul felt and acted on his way to Damascus. Invite the pairs to



Younger kids enjoy walking in big shoes, but if you don't have time to gather the running shoes, let the children wear their own shoes, switch with their partners, or walk in stocking feet.

- line up at the starting point and wait for the green flag.
- with arms around each other's shoulders, walk as fast as they can around the room toward the Damascus sign.
- watch for the red flag and stop in their tracks.

As the children race toward the sign, remind them that they must hurry to find the people who are following Jesus. They must catch them and put them in jail. Hurry!

Raise the red flag before anyone gets all the way to Damascus. Shout, **Stop! You're going the wrong way!** Then ask, **Why was Paul in such a hurry? Why did he hate those who followed Jesus?** Explain that Paul didn't believe that Jesus was God's Son, and he didn't want anyone to follow him. But then something happened! Invite the children to take off their running shoes and listen to the rest of the story.

Hot Wheels Race



Body Smart



People Smart

Option to
step 1

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Wide masking tape
Roadblocks
Hot Wheels cars, one per pair of children
Two flags or scarves: one red and one green

Ahead of time, tape 3' (1 m) strips of wide masking tape to the floor, allowing about 3' (1 m) between each strip. You'll want one strip for each pair of children in your group. Lay or tape roadblocks (stones, pieces of wood, and so on) on all or some of the strips. Mark the finish line with a large letter "D" for Damascus.

As the children gather in your group, give each pair one car, and ask them to imagine that Paul is a modern-day character. Instead of walking to Damascus, he's racing to Damascus to find those who follow Jesus. Invite them to see which pair will get there the fastest. Here are the rules:

- Line up at the starting point and wait for the green flag.
- "Drive" as fast as you can to get to the "D."
- Watch for roadblocks. If a car tips over, the drivers must start over.
- Stop at once when the red flag waves.

Begin the race and continue as described in step 1. Ask, **If God hadn't stopped Paul, what might have happened?**



KNOW

Today's Story Retold



Word Smart



Picture Smart

Goal

Tell how Jesus changed Paul from an enemy to a friend.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Bible
Costume for Paul (optional)
Flashlight

Pretend that you are Paul, and retell the rest of today's story using Acts 9:3-25 as your guideline. (The New International Reader's Version is especially appropriate for younger children.) If you wish, dress the part as well. Shine the flashlight around the group, and then tell these highlights:

- I was racing toward Damascus, when suddenly a light from heaven flashed all around me (v. 3).

- I fell to the ground and heard a voice say . . . (v. 4).
- I asked, “Who are you?” The voice said, “I am Jesus . . . go into the city (vv. 5-6).
- I got up, but I couldn’t see. The men with me led me into the city. For three days . . . (vv. 7-9).
- The Lord spoke to a man named Ananias . . . (vv. 10-16).
- Ananias came to the house where I was staying and . . . (v. 17).
- Right away, I could see again. I wanted to be baptized . . . (v. 18).
- I began preaching about Jesus in the churches in Damascus. People asked, “Isn’t this the man who caused trouble for the followers of Jesus?” I told them . . . (vv. 20-22).

Ask, What do you think? Was this the same man who was racing to catch those followed Jesus? What happened to him?

Although the term *grace* will be new to most of your children, they will understand that God made Paul a friend of Jesus. And God makes us friends of Jesus too. It’s God’s gift of love to us.

Option to step 2

option option option option

Storybook Word Smart Picture Smart

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Storybook: “Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus” (reproducible pages 173-174), copied and assembled
Markers, optional

Use this option if you’re looking for a simpler way to present today’s story. Assemble one storybook before class (see directions on p. 21), and if you wish, use markers to color the pictures. (To make the pictures easier to see, you may want to enlarge the pages of the storybook to full size as you photocopy them.)



An older child might be delighted to read the story to the group. You’ll want to get a copy of the storybook to the child before today’s session so that he or she can practice reading it ahead of time.

Show kids the pictures as you read through the pages together. You may want to use the “Think About It” questions for discussion.



GROW



People Smart



Picture Smart



Word Smart



Self Smart

“Friends of Jesus” Poster

Goal

Sense what a friend of Jesus is like.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Quarter-sheets of drawing paper
Markers
Glue or tacks
Posterboard or bulletin board

Emphasize that God changed Paul from an enemy of Jesus to a friend of Jesus. Ask, **What do you think a friend of Jesus is like?** Children might suggest that Jesus’ friends are kind, loving, and so on. Distribute drawing paper and markers, and ask each child to draw a picture that shows one way a person is a friend of Jesus.

Glue the illustrations to a sheet of posterboard or tack them to a bulletin board to create a collage. Add the heading “Friends of Jesus,” and write captions on the pictures as the children tell the group what they’ve illustrated.

Remind your group that Jesus wants all of us to be his friends. We show we are his friends when we love and obey him and when we love others. Allow a moment of quiet time for the children to think about how they show their love for Jesus. Conclude with a prayer asking God to help each child [name each one] to be a friend of Jesus every day.

SHOW Share the Good News

Goal

Show or tell what a friend of Jesus might do.

Time

15-30 minutes or more

Materials

See individual projects for lists

Like Paul, who told everyone about his friend Jesus everywhere he went, we want to tell the good news about Jesus too. Below are a variety of projects to help kids celebrate God’s grace and share the good news about Jesus with others. Some of the projects run for the entire unit, others are for just this session. Choose one or more that best suits your time frame and the interests of your children.

Unit Project Ideas

Memory Fun Word Smart Picture Smart

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Memory Fun (reproducible page 159-160), one per child
Red markers or crayons

Remind the children that God changed Paul from an enemy of Jesus to a friend of Jesus. God loved Paul even when he didn’t deserve it—we call that God’s *grace*. And this is what Paul tells us: . . . **all of you share in God’s grace with me** (Phil. 1:7b).

Read it again, and have the children repeat it after you. Explain that God loves each one of us too—even when we don’t deserve it. It’s a gift—we can’t buy it, we can’t earn it. God *gives* us his love. To help the children grasp the concept of grace, invite them to draw a heart around the word *grace* on their Memory Fun paper.

Remind the children that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus, his only Son, to be our Savior. And that’s the good news that Paul started telling everyone.

My Journal Word Smart Picture Smart Self Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Small spiral notebooks, one per child
Pencils
Fine-tipped markers, colored pencils
Bibles (New International Reader's Version or other easy-to-read version)
Stickers

Give each child a notebook, and explain that this is his or her very own journal. Each session, kids will have time to

- draw a picture or write a few sentences about their favorite part of the story. (Readers may enjoy using their Bibles to find a verse or two to add.)
- write a note to God or draw a picture for God. (They might show or tell God how much they love him, ask God to take care of someone they love, thank him for things God gives them each day, and so on.)

This first time, provide stickers and markers for children to decorate the cover of their journals. If you plan to read them, be sure each child has given you permission to do so. (If you share from your own journal, kids will likely be more open to sharing theirs, but do respect each person's privacy.)



Keeping a journal is probably a new task for many of your children, especially the younger ones who don't write well. Be ready to give them ideas. And best of all, model this exercise by writing in your own journal as the children work.

Life-Size Posters Body Smart Picture Smart Self Smart

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

Freezer wrap, butcher paper, newsprint
Markers, crayons
Scraps of fabric, buttons, shoelaces, and so on
Glue

Make a life-size poster of each child using a length of freezer wrap, butcher paper, or newsprint. For today, trace around each child while he or she is lying down on the paper sideways in a running position. Invite kids to decorate their life-size poster by drawing in facial features, hair, and clothing. Offer scraps of fabric, buttons, shoelaces, and so on, and encourage them to make their posters original and one-of-a-kind, just as they are.



You can buy large rolls of freezer wrap in most grocery stores. Or you could ask for roll ends of butcher paper from meat departments or roll ends of newsprint from printing shops.

During each of the sessions, children will be adding to the posters; during session 5 you'll be posting them around the church and encouraging kids to tell others the good news about Jesus—just as Paul did. Affirm that God loves each person, and each one shares in God's grace.

One-Session Project Ideas

Storybook Word Smart Picture Smart

Time

15 minutes

Materials


Storybook: "Paul Became a Friend of Jesus" (reproducible pages 173-174), one set per child

Each of the five sessions offers a take-home storybook that the children may share with their family and friends. For today's session, photocopy pages 173-174 and distribute a set to each child. Help the children fold their books as shown below, and encourage older children to help the little ones in your group.

1. Fold both pages in half horizontally.
2. Fold both pages in half vertically.
3. Insert the second set of folded pages into the first set, so that page 3 is opposite of page 2.



Have kids print their names on the cover and color in the pictures. (If you're short on time, just read the booklet with them and let them color it at home.) Encourage them to read the story with their family and friends.

 To save time, assemble the books ahead of time.

Story Grab Bag Word Smart Picture Smart Body Smart

Time

15-20 minutes

Materials

"Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus" cards (reproducible page 175), one per child
Picture of Jesus (reproducible page 177), one per child
Cardstock
Scissors
Paper lunch bags
Glue sticks
Envelopes
Sandpaper
Candles
Colors
Craft foam
Small water bottles
Large foam cups, plastic knives

Ahead of time, photocopy and cut apart the cards and pictures of Jesus. Gather the supplies needed to make the other objects illustrated on the cards, and make a sample grab bag for yourself.

To make the grab bags, have the children follow these steps:

- Glue a “Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus” card to the front of the lunch bag.
- Put an envelope inside the bag.
- Cut a curvy strip of sandpaper (about 2-3" or 5-7.5 cm wide), and put it inside the bag.
- Put a candle inside the bag.
- Color a picture of Jesus, and put it inside the bag.
- Trace one hand on craft foam, cut around it, and put it inside the bag. (Younger children may need help with this step.)
- Put the water bottle inside the bag.
- Use the plastic knife to cut or chip out the bottom of a foam cup; put the cup in the bag.

When everyone has finished, call attention to the cards on the outside of the children’s grab bags. Explain that the pictures and things inside the bags will help them retell the story of how Paul became a friend of Jesus. Hold up each item from your bag, and ask the children to find the same item as you explain these clues:

- **envelope:** Paul asked for letters that would give him permission to find followers of Jesus and put them in prison (Acts 9:2).
- **strip of sandpaper:** Paul was in a hurry as he walked the road from Jerusalem to Damascus (Acts 9:3).
- **candle:** A bright light from heaven stopped Paul. He fell to the ground and couldn’t see (Acts 9:3-4, 7).
- **picture of Jesus:** Jesus asked, “Paul, why are you against me?” (Acts 9:5).
- **hand:** Ananias was a man who loved Jesus. When Ananias laid his hands on Paul, Paul could see again (Acts 9:17).
- **bottle of water:** Paul got up and was baptized (Acts 9:18).
- **cup megaphone:** (Hold cup to your mouth like a megaphone.) Right away, Paul began to tell others about Jesus (Acts 9:20).



If you have time, invite the children to work in pairs and tell the story to each other in their own words. Encourage them to tell the story to their families while someone reads each verse listed on the card from the Bible at mealtime or bedtime.



The grab bag is an excellent tool for encouraging family devotions at home. Remember that this may be a new practice for some of your children’s families.

Red Flag/Green Flag Game



People Smart



Body Smart



Picture Smart



Word Smart

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

Red, green, and black-and-white checkered flags or scarves
Masking tape

Ahead of time, clear an area in your room, or better yet move your group to a larger space or outside. Mark the finish line with masking tape.

Show the children the flags, and explain that flags are used to help race car drivers know how to drive. The green flag is used to start the race, the red flag is used to stop the race if there is a serious problem, and the black-and-white checkered flag is waved for the winner.

Tell the children they'll be playing a game called "Red Flag/Green Flag" (like "Red Light/Green Light"). Line kids up at the starting line as far from you as space allows. The goal is to be the first one to get past the finish line—the line marked with masking tape where you will stand. Explain the rules as follows:

- When you wave the green flag, the children can walk towards you very quickly.
- When you wave the red flag, everyone must stop. (To make the game more competitive, watch for children who keep moving and send them back to the starting line.)

When everyone has reached the finish line, gather the children around you and rest a minute. Then talk about how being a friend of Jesus is like a race. The red flag—like the light that stopped Paul—tells us to stop and listen to Jesus. The green flag tells us to go and tell others about Jesus. The black-and-white checkered flag reminds us that someday we will finish our race on earth and live in heaven with Jesus.



**No time to gather the flags?
Just make them from construc-
tion paper.**

Flashlight Cupcakes



Body Smart



People Smart



Picture Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Yellow frosting
Plastic knives
Candles, matches; optional

Ahead of time, bake cupcake batter in plain ice cream cones. Let the children frost the cupcakes, and, if you wish, stick a candle in each one. As you light the candles, celebrate that when the light shone on Paul, God changed him from an enemy of Jesus to a friend of Jesus. Remind the children that Jesus wants them to be his friends too—and that's something to be really happy about!

Paul Becomes a Friend of Jesus

Scripture

Acts 9:1-22

Memory Challenge

Acts 20:24

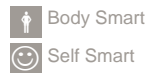
Focus

God puts Paul on the road to following Jesus.



HELLO

Blindfolds



Goal

Wonder why God made Paul blind.

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Blindfolds (one per child)

As the children gather in your small group, give each one a blindfold. Have kids put them on for a minute or so and see what it feels like when you can't see. Take a minute to review what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus, and then wonder together **why God made Paul blind**. Allow time for group response and then share some of these observations:

- **Was it so that Paul would listen more carefully?**
People who are visually impaired sometimes say that their senses of hearing, touch, and taste are sharper because they can't see.
- **Was it so that Paul would become more dependent on God?**
Paul was an independent, even strong-willed person, determined to get those who followed Jesus. God had another plan, and Paul had three days to think about that.
- **Was it so that Paul would know for sure that Jesus was God's Son?**
God used the bright light, Jesus' voice from heaven, and Paul's blindness to convince him that Jesus is truly the Son of God.

Emphasize that God can change our hearts too and put us on the road to following Jesus. Pray that God will do this for each child.



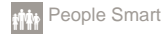
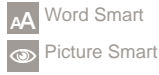
Be sensitive to any child in your group who is visually impaired.

Be ready to acknowledge that we can't always understand why God allows disabilities, but we can be sure that God cares for us.

2

KNOW

Retelling the Story



Goal

Tell what happened on the road to Damascus and how it changed Paul's life.

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

Newsprint
Masking tape
Bible
Marker
Blindfolds from step 1

Ahead of time, tape two sheets of newsprint to a blank wall or bulletin board in your room, allowing some space between. Choose a Bible that is easy to read. (The New Living Translation is easy to read and prints Jesus' words in red. Other easy-to-read versions include the New International Reader's Version and the New Century Version.)

As you prepare to retell today's story about Paul, explain that the book of Acts was written by Dr. Luke, a friend of Paul and a follower of Jesus. Throughout the book of Acts, we read about Peter and Paul and the beginnings of the early church. Luke shows us how the Holy Spirit is at work. Many people were becoming Christians, and Paul (Saul, his Hebrew name) was out to get these new Christians.

Explain that you'll need everyone's help to retell Paul's story, and then appoint kids to these roles (or let them choose):

- readers

Ask two good readers to read the passage from Acts 9:1-22. One will read the words of Jesus, the other will read the rest of the passage. *They must read with expression to show how Paul's feelings changed.*



If your group is large, ask two more children to read. One person can read the words Paul spoke and another the words Ananias spoke.

- artists

Ask two kids to illustrate how Paul appeared in the story. One will show Paul as an enemy of Jesus; the other will show Paul as a friend of Jesus. Stick figures are fine; facial expressions and body positions are important! They may each draw more than one illustration, but *they must wait for the readers to describe Paul from Scripture before they draw him.*

- listeners

Invite the rest of the group to put on their blindfolds and to listen carefully to every word. When the readers and artists are finished, this group will critique the drawings and decide if Paul really looks like the changed person the Bible describes. *If necessary, they can make one change to each picture to emphasize what happened to Paul.*

Emphasize that only God could change Paul's heart and put him on the right road to following Jesus. Although the term *grace* may be new to some of your children, explain that God's love to Paul—and to us—is a gift. We can't buy it; we can't earn it.

God loves us even when we're still sinners, and that's why God sent Jesus to be our Savior.

Readers' Theater with Pantomime

AA Word Smart People Smart Body Smart

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Bibles, one per child
Flashlight

Help the children find the book of Acts in their Bibles, and tell them a little about the book as described in step 1. Then assign these parts:

- Paul
- Jesus
- Ananias
- Narrator (reads all other parts)

Ask one person to operate the flashlight. Divide the rest of the group into three teams to pantomime the actions of

- Paul
- his friends
- Ananias

Ask the readers to read slowly to allow time for the lights and actions. (You'll want to do a bit of coaching as needed.) Conclude the story as in step 1.



GROW

Measuring the Ways We Grow

AA Word Smart
Body Smart

Number Smart
Self Smart

Goal

Sense that God can change our lives too.

Time

10 minutes

Materials

Tape measures
Board/newsprint, chalk/marker
Masking tape
Bibles, optional
Sticky notes (one per child)

Bring several tape measures to class and have the children work in pairs to measure their height. Have them stand against a board or sheet of newsprint and mark each one's height on the board. Or you can mark their height with masking tape on a wall or door. Be sure to add names to the markings.

Note that you've just measured *physical* growth. Ask, **Is physical growth the only way Jesus wants us to grow?** To share the example Jesus gave us, read this passage (or have the children look it up in their Bibles): **So Jesus grew both in height and in wisdom, and he was loved by God and by all who knew him** (Luke 2:52, NLT).

Point out that this verse tells us that Jesus grew in these ways:

- physically (height)
- mentally/emotionally (in wisdom)
- spiritually (loved by God)
- socially (by all who knew him)

Give kids sticky notes and invite them to write down one way they are growing spiritually—or one way they would like to grow spiritually. (Perhaps they are reading the Bible more, or perhaps they want to be more patient with others.) Have them stick the notes next to their height measurements and give thanks for how God is changing them.

4 SHOW

Share the Good News

Goal

Show or tell what a follower of Jesus might do.

Time

15-30 minutes or more

Materials

See individual projects for lists

Like Paul, who told everyone about his friend Jesus everywhere he went, we want to tell the good news about Jesus too. Below are a variety of projects to help kids apply this story to their lives. Some of the projects are for the entire unit of five sessions; others are for just this session. Choose one or more that best suits your time frame and the interests of your kids.



Some activities may be more suitable for kids in grades 4 and 5, others to middle school kids. Try to choose the ones that are most appropriate for your group. If you have all grade levels in one group, you may want to pair older children with younger children.

Unit Project Ideas

Memory Challenge Word Smart Picture Smart

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Memory Challenge (reproducible page 161 or 162), one per child
Running shoes (reproducible page 179), one per child
Cardstock for shoes
Trims to personalize shoes (see below)
Scissors, glue sticks
Paper punch
Shoelaces, one per child

Ahead of time, make one photocopy of the Memory Challenge and running shoes for each child. (Photocopy the shoes on cardstock.) Collect trims for kids to use to personalize their shoes. (Buttons, eyelets, tie-on objects, and so on are available at craft stores. Check the scrapbook aisles, and select things that reflect the interests of your kids.)

Have kids cut out the shoes and glue the verse to the back of the shoe. Read it together, and note what Paul's race was about. Invite kids to trim their running shoes to reflect their personality and their desire to run the race with Paul. Have them punch a hole in the shoe and tie it to their backpacks (or belt loops) with a shoelace. It's a great conversation starter for telling others about Jesus.

My Journal



Word Smart



Picture Smart



Self Smart

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Small spiral notebooks, one per child
Pens or pencils
Bibles (New International Reader's Version or other easy-to-read versions suggested)
Markers

Give each child a notebook, and explain that this will be their very own journal. Each session, they will have time to

- write a few sentences about their favorite part of the story (or copy a few verses from the story in Acts).
- write a note to God. (This might be in the form of a prayer, a poem or song, or a drawing.)

Encourage kids to decorate the covers of their journals. If you plan to read them, be sure each child has given you permission to do so. (If you share from your own journal, they'll likely be more open to sharing theirs, but do respect each person's privacy.)



Keeping a journal may be a new experience for some of your children, especially the younger ones. Be ready to give them ideas (simple sentence starters, "what if" questions, and so on). Best of all, model this exercise by writing in your own journal as the children work.

Trivia Cards

Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

Notecards
Pens or pencils
Bibles



Trivia cards are a fun way to introduce others to the stories about Paul. You might set up a game area during the fellowship time following your summer celebration program, and have your group of kids lead the game.

Divide your group into teams of two or three, and give each team several notecards. Explain that you want the teams to make trivia cards about Paul's stories. Today, they'll focus on the story from Acts 9 about Paul becoming a friend of Jesus. Have them write one question on each card and the answer on the back of the card. Offer Bibles for them to find questions or to check their answers. (One or more study Bibles would be helpful.)

Here's a few sample questions you might throw out to get them started:

- **How far was it from Jerusalem to Damascus?**
(The *NIV Study Bible* says it was about 150 miles.)
- **What time of the day did the light from heaven shine on Paul?**
(The *NIV Study Bible* says it was about noon.)
- **What did Paul's friends say when they heard the sound but didn't see anyone?**
(Acts 9:7 says they were "speechless"—they didn't say anything!)

Allow 5-10 minutes and then have the teams exchange cards and try to answer the questions. Afterward, collect the cards so you can set them out each time. It's a good game to play if kids finish a project early.

Being a Friend



Self Smart



People Smart



Body Smart



Word Smart



Picture Smart

Time

15 minutes or more

Materials

Articles from newspapers, church magazines, and brochures
Newsprint, marker
Scissors

Ahead of time, collect pictures and articles from newspapers, church magazines, agency brochures, and so on that show people being a friend of Jesus and showing his love to others.

Ask kids to make a list of qualities of a good friend. (For example, a friend is loving, kind, generous, helpful, sharing, forgiving, and so on.) List their responses on newsprint.

Then distribute pictures and articles from newspapers, church magazines, and brochures that show people demonstrating these qualities of being a good friend to others. Invite the group to think of one way that together they can demonstrate that they are friends of Jesus to someone in your church or community. Here are a few ideas:

- conduct a clean-up campaign around and inside the building where you're holding VBS or Sunday school. (Be sure to work with the custodian for this project.)
- collect new and used children's Bible storybooks, and send one home with each preschooler who attends the summer celebration program. Or bring the books to a women's shelter and have your kids read to the children there.
- bake and serve bars to the senior Sunday school class or to a group of seniors in an assisted living apartment. Play a game of trivia with them using the cards the children have made.
- with the children's families, volunteer to serve a meal and present your summer celebration program at a homeless shelter.



To help your group select a project they can do during this unit, you may wish to bring only articles and pictures that describe one or two projects—for example, people working in a food pantry or loading trucks with food for hurricane victims (or helping the elderly with yard work, or clean-up, and so on).

Paul, the Writer—to You!



Word Smart



People Smart



Self Smart

Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Study Bibles, one per two or three children
Newsprint, marker

Give each team of two or three children a study Bible, and invite them to find the New Testament and then the book of Acts.

Point the children to Acts 1:1 and then to the study note for this verse that explains who the writer of this book is. Note that Luke—not Paul—wrote the book of Acts, but it contains many stories about Paul's race for Jesus.

Then invite the children to see how many New Testament books Paul wrote. Hint that the first verse of the book often tells who the author is. Or have them check the introduction to each book. List their discoveries on newsprint.



If some kids in your group are not familiar with the Bible, pair them with children who can help them find their way around. Making others feel welcome in this way is a great way to be a friend of Jesus.

Then challenge each child to pick one of Paul’s books to read for their personal devotions. (You might suggest Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, or Colossians since they’re relatively short.) Suggest that they keep a journal as part of their devotions, and be prepared to share one or two thoughts with the group during your final session.

One-Session Project Ideas

Devotions for Home/Bible Skills Word Smart



Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Devotions for Home: “Paul and Stephen’s Paths Cross” (reproducible pages 181-182), one per child
Bibles

Have your children work in pairs, and give each pair one Bible. As you read the story “Paul and Stephen’s Paths Cross” to the group, stop to let each pair find these verses in their Bibles:

- Acts 6:7
- Acts 6:8
- Acts 7:52
- Acts 7:58

Rather than reading these verses yourself, call on pairs to read them aloud to the group as you come to them in the story. If you have time, discuss one or more of the questions.

Send a copy of the devotional home with each child, and encourage the kids to follow this same process at home. Perhaps an adult can read the story while kids read the verses; everyone can discuss the questions.

Reflection Word Smart



Time

10 minutes

Materials

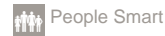
“Ready, Set, Go!” (reproducible page 183), one copy per child
Markers
Pens or pencils

Hand out pens or pencils and copies of “Ready, Set, Go!” Then invite kids to find a quiet corner where they can think about what it means to follow Jesus—to run the race of life. Encourage them to write their answers to the questions.

If kids are willing, invite them to share which question they found the hardest to answer. Ask, **What’s the hardest part about following Jesus? Why?** To encourage them, read these words of Paul (it’s the Memory Fun for K-3): . . . **all of you share in God’s grace with me** (Phil. 1:7b).

Remind the children that they aren’t running the race of life alone—God has sent Jesus to run for them, and the Holy Spirit to give them strength and courage.

The Persecuted Church



Time

10-15 minutes

Materials

Voice of the Martyrs magazines
Denominational magazines
Computer with Internet access, optional
Notecards, one per child

To help your group become aware that Christians are still persecuted today, do a little research and reading about the persecuted church. Perhaps your pastor or others in your church community have copies of *Voice of the Martyrs* you could use. Your denominational magazine may also have stories.



You can find stories about the persecuted church on the web at www.persecutionblog.com. If you can't bring a computer to your group, visit the site ahead of time and print out some of the articles.

Ask, **Do you think Christians are still persecuted today?** You'll likely find a wide range of knowledge about this subject among your group. Share some articles you've found and give each person (or pair) time to read the story and then share a few of the details with the group. Ask, **Who is this about? What happened? Where? Why?** As the reports are given, record the names of the persecuted Christians on separate notecards so that each child in your group will have one card. (Duplicate names are fine.)

Have each child draw a card and commit to pray for the person drawn. Join in a "pop-corn" prayer right now. Open the prayer time yourself and invite each child to mention the name of the person on the card.

Paul's Version of the Story



Time

5-10 minutes

Materials

Bible
Newsprint, marker

Paul tells his own version of his conversion in Acts 22:1-16. As you read his story to the group, ask one person to record any new information the group is learning about Paul. Especially note the following:

- Paul was a Jew (v. 3).
- He knew the law of God (v. 3).
- He loved God (v. 3).
- He persecuted followers of Jesus to their death (v. 4).
- He was struck by the bright light about noon (v. 6).
- He was invited to be baptized and have his sins washed away (v. 16).

Perhaps this exercise will help your group to understand God's grace even more. Even through Paul claimed to love God, he was heading the wrong way. God turned him around so that he became a friend of Jesus. Conclude by asking each child to silently answer this question Ananias asked Paul: **What are you waiting for?** (v. 16).



This might be an opportune time to invite children in your group to make a public commitment to Jesus. Be willing to mentor them as they go through the process of professing their faith before their church family.