

Love each other like the members of your family. (Romans 12:10a)

## **The Church Grows – Acts 9:26-31**

### **Prepare to Wonder**

#### **Faith Word: LOVE**

Today's story takes place after Saul's (Paul's) conversion. The text says that Paul tries to join the other disciples when he arrives in Jerusalem, but they are afraid of him. They doubt Paul's desire to become a disciple of Jesus. Up until Paul's blinding experience on the road to Damascus, he was an enemy of Christianity and a persecutor of those who practiced the faith.

The disciples see Paul as a persecutor, not a believer. They do not trust that Paul has changed. Barnabas brings Paul to the apostles and serves as a witness to Paul's conversion story. After this, Paul is accepted in Jerusalem and begins to preach in the name of the Lord.

It's hard to trust that people who have hurt us can change. How can we trust their intentions when we have been harmed? This was the struggle of Jesus' followers in the story. However, Paul proved his faith and was supported by a witness, Barnabas. There are times when it is not right to trust someone again, but there are also times when we can witness change. In these moments of conversion, we can see God at work and can be a witness for those who need our love.

After Paul's conversion, the church grew and people came to know the God of transformation through the Spirit. We can trust in God that people can change and that we can find ways to be part of God's transformative love.

#### **Spiritual Practice for Adults**

Controversy is hard. How do you respond in difficult situations? How do you interact with those who are different from you? This week, pray with others. Notice the words they use, their body language, and so forth. What do you learn about God through their eyes and their faith? God shows up for everyone in different ways.

# Come Together

## Welcome to Wonder

**Supplies:** *Class Pack—pp. 10 & 23, 16 & 17; Leader Guide—pp. 4, 85; Activity Sheets (Session 11); Celebrate Wonder Annual Music CD; CD player; stickers or markers; items for Wonder Table (small table, white cloth, and items such as a candle, plant, cross); Wonder Box; nesting dolls; pens; pencils*

**Prepare Ahead:** *Display the Attendance Chart (Class Pack—pp. 16 & 17). Set up a Wonder Table (see Leader—p. 4). Place the nesting dolls inside the Wonder Box. Set the Wonder Box on the Wonder Table.*

- Play “Celebrate Wonder” (CD) as the children arrive. Lyrics are on page 85 of the Leader Guide.
- Greet each child. Show the children where to mark the Attendance Chart using a sticker or a marker.
- Distribute this week’s Activity Sheet (Session 11). Help the children complete the activities.

**Tip:** *Display the Wonder Wall poster (Class Pack—pp. 10 & 23), or use the instructions on the back of the poster to create your own.*

## Sing and Celebrate

**Supplies:** *Leader Guide—p. 88, Celebrate Wonder Annual Music CD or Celebrate Wonder DVD, CD player, DVD player, TV*

**Prepare Ahead:** *Photocopy “Song Sheet—Unit 3” for each child.*

- Gather the children around the Wonder Table, and hand out the Song Sheets.
- Play “A Strong Wind” (CD or DVD). Invite the children to sing and celebrate.

## Wonder Time

### Share a Story

**Supplies:** *CEB Bible; Class Pack—pp. 8 & 25, 19; Celebrate Wonder DVD; TV; DVD player*

**Prepare Ahead:** *Obtain the Unit 3 Wonder Story Mat (pp. 8 & 25) and the Wonder Story Mat Figures (p. 19). You will use Acts 9:31b today.*

- Lay the Unit 3 Wonder Story Mat on the floor.

- Read from the Bible today's story in Acts 9:26-31.
- Let a child move or place Acts 9:31b on the Wonder Story Mat.
- Watch the Session 11 video on the DVD.

## Wonder with Me

**Supplies:** *Class Pack—insert, pp. 11 & 22; Wonder Box (containing nesting dolls)*

**Prepare Ahead:** *Display the Unit 3 Faith Word poster (Class Pack—pp. 11 & 22), and locate the Wonder Cube (Class Pack—insert).*

- Let a child roll the Wonder Cube. Direct the children to answer the question(s) about the Bible story. You can interact with the Wonder Cube as time allows.
- Then pick up the Wonder Box and place it in front of the children.

**SAY:** Today's faith word is *Love*: a closeness and connection that we feel with God and others.

- Wonder together:
  - How does love grow?
  - Who showed love in the Bible story?
  - Does love change us?
- Open the Wonder Box and reveal the nesting dolls.

**SAY:** Like these dolls, through love, the church grows and grows and our faith gets bigger and bigger.

- Let the children interact with the nesting dolls.

## Experience Wonder

### I See You (Craft)

**Supplies:** *Leader Guide—p. 72, markers, crayons, scissors, pipe cleaners, tape*

**Prepare Ahead:** *Photocopy "I See You" (Leader Guide) for each child.*

**SAY:** We sometimes see people in a certain way. We might think they are mean or unfriendly, but we can see who they really are when we get to know them.

- Distribute copies of "I See You." Invite each child to choose a glasses frame and to color it and cut it out.
- Show how to attach a pipe cleaner on each side and fit them to the ears.

**WONDER:** What kinds of people do you see in the world? Is there someone in your life you could see differently?

## In Your Shoes (Game)

*Supplies: different types of shoes*

- Have the children divide into two teams, and have each team form a line. Place the various types of shoes on the other side of the room, and mix them up.

**SAY:** We do not always understand why someone acts a certain way. But when we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, we might be able to see who they truly are. To put ourselves in another's shoes means to see things from another perspective.

- Tell the children that the two teams are going to participate in a relay race. The first person on each team will walk quickly to the other side of the room, put on a pair of matching shoes, walk back to her or his team, and take off the shoes.
- The next child will put on the shoes, walk back to the pile of shoes, take off the shoes, put on a different pair of shoes, walk back to her or his team, and take off the shoes.
- Continue until all players have walked in the shoes. The team that completes the task first wins.

## Who Are You? (Reflection)

*Supplies: paper, pencils*

- Divide the children into pairs, and give each child paper and a pencil.

**SAY:** It's important to get to know our friends to better understand them. You are invited to share special things about yourself with a friend.

- Have each child share with a friend 5 to 10 things that make him or her special.
- After everyone has completed this task, bring the group back together and invite partners to share about their friend.

*Tip: If children do not feel comfortable sharing, they do not have to do so.*

## Peaceful Place

**Supplies:** suggested books: *"It Will Be Okay: Trusting God Through Fear and Change"* by Lysa TerKeurst and *"You Will Be My Friend!"* by Peter Brown; quiet items: nesting dolls, old eye glasses

- Locate the suggested books and quiet items, and place them in the Peaceful Place.
- Allow children who want or need a quieter activity to visit the Peaceful Place.

**Tip:** You may choose to include other quiet toys, books, or activities.

## Go in Peace

### Spiritual Practice—Exploring Love Through Service

**Supplies:** Leader Guide—p. 89, *"Celebrate Wonder Family Activity Book"* (optional)

**Prepare Ahead:** Photocopy *"Celebration Chart"* (Leader Guide) for children who have not received it yet.

- Gather the children in a circle near the Wonder Table.

**SAY:** In the Bible story, the followers of Jesus grew through love. Today our church grows and grows when we show love to others.

- Have the children fold their hands together with their fingers intertwined.
- Invite the children to follow your motions and repeat your words.

**SAY:** (*Fold hands together with the fingers interlaced.*) Here is the church.

**SAY:** (*Point index fingers up and together.*) Here is the steeple.

**SAY:** (*Open hands and wiggle fingers.*) Open the doors and see all the people.

**SAY:** (*Close hands.*) Close the doors and hear them pray.

**SAY:** (*Open hands.*) Open the doors and spread God's love today.

- Repeat this practice.
- Send *"Celebration Chart"* home with children who did not receive it yet.
- Encourage the children and their families to use the *"Celebration Chart"* and to read together the quarterly *Celebrate Wonder Family Activity Book* (if purchased).

