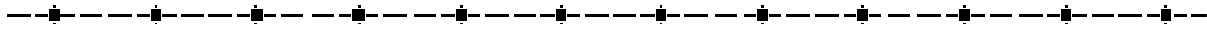


# GOD'S BIG PLAN

## The Church Grows Acts 17:16-34

**Supporting Scriptures:** Acts 4, 6-11; Rom 1:14-17, 10:13-15; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Ephesians 5; Hebrews 12:1-3



**Lesson Goals:** To understand that God has a big plan.  
To understand that God's commands are to be followed.  
To see that we can share God's word just like Jesus' first followers did.

**Scripture Memory** As for us, there's no question—we can't keep quiet about what we've seen and heard.  
Acts 4:20 (MSG)

**NOTE:** Familiarize yourself with this story. Don't read it. Tell it as a STORY. To reinforce that these ideas are not your own, hold your Bible as you tell the story.

**The Lesson:** Let's review what we have learned so far. (Review the previous stories, focusing on those leading to Christ's death and resurrection. Encourage your students to share.)

What instructions did Jesus give His followers before He returned to heaven? He told them, "While you are going, make followers of all people in the world. When they believe, baptize them. You are to baptize them in the name of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And after you have baptized them, teach them. Teach them everything that I have told you. I will always be with you." He also blessed them and told them that when the Holy Spirit was given to them, they would receive power. With that power they would do what Jesus had already asked them to do. He explained a little more by telling them, "You will be my witnesses. You'll start at home, right here in Jerusalem. Then you'll move out to the neighboring cities of Judea. Then, you'll move even farther out to areas like Samaria. After that, you will go to the whole world."

Did God keep His promise of sending the Holy Spirit? (Yes!) How? Well, He sent the Holy Spirit to those who were already believers on the day of Pentecost. Then, for every person who believed after that, the Holy Spirit came to live in them when they believed. Why do we need the Holy Spirit? (We need Him to help us, teach us, and remind us of God's Word.) What do you think happened to Jesus' followers after they received the Holy Spirit? Let's read on to find out.

**READ: John 14:12-18 (Hold your Bible open throughout the story.)**

Jesus' followers loved Him. Loving Jesus means obeying Him. So, while they were going around and about their hometown of Jerusalem, Jesus' followers healed lame men, raised the dead, and told the people they met that God had sent the Promised One. Many people everyday believed. And just as it had been with Jesus, not everyone liked what they were doing. Peter and John were taken before the leaders. They were thrown into jail overnight. The next day, they were freed and told to be quiet, never to speak to anyone in Jesus' name. Peter and John's answer was this, "Think about it. Should we obey you or should we obey God? As for us, there's no question—we can't keep quiet about what we've seen and heard." Peter and John had seen some amazing things and they couldn't keep quiet. They had to tell.

So God's word spread. There were now many believers in Jerusalem. But difficult times came. The Jewish leaders didn't like what was happening. The church in Jerusalem began to be attacked. They were

treated badly. They were run out of Jerusalem in hopes that they would no longer speak of Jesus. But God was in control. As they were scattered away from their hometown of Jerusalem, they settled in the neighboring cities in Judea and they moved farther out into Samaria. They didn't stop sharing about Jesus; instead, the believers who had been scattered, preached the word everywhere they went.

Another of Jesus' followers, Philip, was preaching and many were believing every day when God decided to send him to a man from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian worked for Queen Candace. This man was reading God's word but didn't understand it. Philip explained to Him that God sent His One and only Son to die for each of us. The Ethiopian believed and was baptized. Other things began to happen, as well. Peter realized through a vision from God that God's good news is for everyone. Women believed and followed and were allowed to teach. Still, not everyone was pleased that God's good news was spreading.

A young man named Saul was persecuting the church. He would go from city to city and have the believers arrested. But just as Peter learned that God's word is for everyone, God had other plans for Saul. God met him on the way to carry out his hateful work. God changed Saul's heart of hate for one of love and changed his name to Paul. Paul spent time at first learning from Jesus' followers and then he took God's message farther than anyone had ever taken it, to Rome, Italy. Paul made journey after journey from one city to the next, telling about God's love. Paul started churches in city after city like Berea, Antioch, and Thessalonica. Believers studied God's word for themselves. Paul also went to Athens, Greece. The city of Athens was full of statues of other gods because the people in Athens liked to listen to all the latest ideas. They worshipped many gods, but they were willing to listen to Paul. "I've looked around at the things you worship," Paul explained, "and I found a statue labeled 'to an unknown god'." "Now I'll tell you who this 'unknown god' is. He made the whole world and everything in it. He doesn't live in temples that man builds. He made us all from one man and causes us to be born when we are, in the place He chooses. He does this so that people will look for Him. He can be found because is not very far from any of us. It is because of Him that we live and move and exist. We are God's children. But God is no statue that men plan and make. And He commands all people everywhere to turn away from their sins." A few people became followers of Jesus that day. Others laughed at what they heard. But through it all, God was working, reaching out to those who had never heard through those who were being obedient to Him. And people were responding.

**Review:**

Let's review what you have learned. Who would like to retell the story? (Ask your group if anything was left out or told inaccurately.) Would anyone else like to retell the story?

How about you? Where do you fit in today's story? Maybe you are one of those people who has never heard about God's good news. Maybe you never knew that Jesus came to die for you. What will you do with that information? Will you laugh at it as some of the people in Athens did or will you accept Him as your own. The Bible tells us that, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Will you?

God's word says that, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But it continues with some questions. How can people call on God unless they believe? How will they believe unless they hear about Him? How will they hear about God unless someone tells them? And how can anyone tell them if they have not been sent? Well, that's what Jesus did right before He returned to heaven - He sent His disciples out to tell the whole world. Because they were obedient, you and I have heard about Jesus and can choose for ourselves if we will believe in God and call out to Him. Just imagine if the disciples had been too afraid or too busy to obey Jesus. We might never have had the opportunity to hear God's good news. They have left us an example. There are other people who need to know about Jesus that maybe only you can tell. If you have already made the decision to believe in Jesus, you are called to go and tell. Who can you tell in your hometown? What about the next town over? And when you go out-of-town, have you ever thought that you could tell people there about Jesus! Don't stop telling about the amazing things of God you have seen and heard!

**Planning for Next Week**  
**Lesson 46 • Love One Another**  
**1 John 4**

# PRESCHOOL LESSON

**SING:** “Silver and Gold Have I None”

**SHARE:** Jesus’ followers loved Him. Loving Jesus means obeying Him. So, while they were going around and about their hometown of Jerusalem, Jesus’ followers told the people they met that God had sent the Promised One. Many people everyday believed.

One day, two of Jesus’ followers, Peter and John, were going to church to pray. Peter and John had to go through a gate to enter the church. At the gate was a man who couldn’t walk. He was at the gate to beg for money because he couldn’t work. The man asked Peter and John for money.

Peter and John didn’t ignore the man. They didn’t turn their heads and pretend not to see him. Instead, they looked straight at him. The man thought for sure that he would get something from them. But Peter said, “I don’t have any money, no silver or gold. I’ll give you what I do have. In Jesus’ name, get up and walk.” Peter took the man’s right hand and helped him up and the man who had never walked, stood up. When he did, his ankles and feet immediately became strong. The man was so excited that he walked around, jumping up and down, and praising God.

Wouldn’t you think that everyone celebrated with the man who could now walk? Well, they didn’t. Just as it had been with Jesus, not everyone liked what Jesus’ followers were doing. Peter and John were taken before the leaders. They were thrown into jail overnight. The next day, they were freed and told to be quiet, never to speak to anyone else about Jesus.

Peter and John answered the leaders, “Think about it. Should we obey you or should we obey God? As for us, there's no question—we can't keep quiet about what we've seen and heard.” Peter and John had seen some amazing things and they couldn’t keep quiet. They had to tell.

How about you? Do you tell others about the wonderful things God can do?

**SING AGAIN:** “Silver and Gold Have I None”

**PRAY:** Thank you, God, for sending people to tell me about you.

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Memory Verse Activity - Make megaphones. Cut the end from a small paper cup. Print the memory verse on construction paper and glue around the cup. Practice shouting the memory verse through your megaphones!
- Make an expanding church. Using a long strip of narrow paper, draw a church at both ends. Fold accordion style, into one stack. Stretch out the church and talk about how the church grew when Jesus' followers were obedient in telling others.
- Read Acts 11:19-26. Make word puzzles with the word "Christian." Talk about believers first being called Christians in Antioch. It comes from the name of Jesus "Christ," that means He is God's Promised One. It might have been used originally to make fun of believers, but was soon accepted to mean "anyone who is a follower of Jesus Christ."
- Sing "I am a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N."
- Talk about what it means to be a "Berean." Read Acts 17:10-12. What are the characteristics of believers in Berea?
- Provide maps of Paul's Missionary Journeys. Talk about the many places that Paul went to share God's good news.
- Where's Your Jerusalem? Discuss Acts 1:8. Review the lesson and talk about the places Peter, Philip and Paul went in obedience to Jesus. Where can you go?