Lydia April 25, 2021

**Bible Verses:** Acts 16:11-15

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 532 to 535

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **Learning about the wide variety of early Christians.**

We tend to think of early disciples as itinerant, bearded men… but Lydia is a great example of the way the early church was expanding. It involves reading between the lines of the biblical text a bit, but we can get a better picture of who Lydia was than most other figures from the New Testament. We are told that she was “a worshiper of God”, a term that meant a Gentile who worshiped the Jewish understanding of God rather than the Roman gods. She was from Thyatira, a city that specialized in producing purple dye, which would have been rare and a luxury good – and although it isn’t spelled out, the fact that she was a seller of purple cloth and there is a later reference to “her and her household” seems to signal that she may have been wealthy. Benefactors like Lydia were crucial to the start of the early church; their generosity helped itinerant preachers like Paul – and the wider community who were in need!

* **Learning about 1st century “house churches”.**

We’ll never know if Lydia’s household continued to be an important gathering spot for early Christians in Philippi, but it does give us an opportunity to imagine what life might have been like for those earliest Christians! People gathering in homes for small, simple worship – reading letters of instruction from Paul, and perhaps relying on sermons from those within their community, while also sharing the Communion meal with one another. Early house churches did not have had pastors; instead, everyone in the community was responsible for taking on various roles: preaching, reading letters, praying, hosting, sponsoring meals, inviting others to join their community, etc. This can be an opportunity to think with kids about the type of role they would have wanted to play – or would have been afraid to play.

* **Learning about Paul’s work and ministry.**

We’ll continue discussing Paul for the next few weeks, but this sort of 1-on-1 ministry was likely as typical for Paul as the public preaching that he is better known for. Paul was certainly a persuasive speaker, but public preaching is just one of many ways that the early church spread – and it may be worth taking some time to think about other ways that early Christians shared their faith… and how we might today. What do we think is the best way to share or demonstrate our faith in Jesus, and help others understand Jesus’ mission and ministry? Is it through talking? Through actions? Through writing? Through TV ads? Through social media posts?

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
  + Younger kids: Did you do anything for Earth Day this past week?
  + Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **We’re learning about Lydia today – and she owned her own business selling purple cloth. If you ran a business, what would it be?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Our passage today gives us an example of someone who decided to follow Jesus – even though she learned about Jesus from someone else!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + You’ll need to screen share the passage for the day in Zoom.
  + Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
  + Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Paul taught Lydia what it meant to follow Jesus and to be a disciple. What would *you* tell Lydia about what it means to follow Jesus?
* Lydia is just one example of the hundreds of new disciples that began to join the church – why do you think Christianity became so popular?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* Paul taught others about Jesus through preaching in the middle of the city. Is that something you would feel comfortable doing? How else might you tell (or show) someone about who Jesus was?
* Lydia decided to become a Christian and she was baptized – what do you remember about your own baptism? What does it mean to be baptized?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* During the season of Eastertide, we learn about people who helped the church grow – particularly during those earliest years. It’s thought that Lydia started her own house church – would you rather have church at home all of the time, or go to a church building? Why?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions**

* Today we are learning about a woman named Lydia who decided to follow Jesus – and she had a business selling purple clothes. What is your favorite color, or what color do you wear a lot?
* Paul spent most of his time travelling and teaching other people – that’s how he met Lydia. What makes someone a good teacher? How do your teachers help you learn?

**Fun Activity**

* Lydia from our Bible passage today was famous for selling purple cloth – so I thought it would be fun to play a game that involves noticing different colors: I Spy!
* (Explain that you’ll be looking at people’s backgrounds and you’ll say the color of something that you spy… kids have to guess what it is!)
  + You can be the one naming colors at first, but then anyone who wants to should have a chance to be the one “spying” things
  + If someone has something purple on their screen, that would be an easy way to start!
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Paul helped teach Lydia what it meant to follow Jesus and what it meant to be a disciple. What would you say it means to follow Jesus? How does being a disciple change the way we’re supposed to treat others?
* Lydia – and everyone in her home! – were baptized after talking with Paul. What do you remember about your baptism? Why is baptism a special thing?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**John Muir**

After celebrating Earth Day earlier this week, it seems fitting to learn about someone who cared deeply for God’s creation: John Muir, one of the great conservationists of the 19th and 20th centuries.

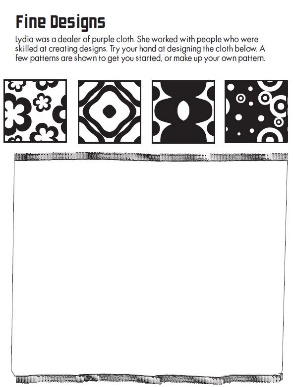
Muir was born in Scotland and grew up in a very strict Scottish Presbyterian household – his father often forced all eight of his children to read the Bible for hours each day. By middle school, Muir had memorized almost 75% of the Bible – and the Bible remained deeply meaningful to him the rest of his life.

Nothing, however, was as satisfying to Muir as spending time in nature. When he was 11, Muir’s family moved to Wisconsin – eventually leading Muir to study botany and chemistry at Madison (though never obtaining a degree). He eventually took odd jobs to survive; however, after an industrial accident left him temporarily blind he left his job – resolving to become an explorer.

Muir explored the wilderness and lived outside for the next several months, walking 1,000 miles from Kentucky to Florida. After several more expeditions, he found his way to the West Coast and met several more like-minded naturalists – including Ralph Waldo Emerson, his hero. Through these relationships, Muir began to be an advocate for the need for land conservation and for the U.S. government to set aside more areas as national parks.

Muir helped to found the “Sierra Club”, which soon became a strong advocate for creating Yosemite National park – eventually convincing Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt of the need through a series of camping trips with him. Indeed, many of our national parks were created because of Muir’s advocacy – to him, nature was where he felt his strongest connection to God. “Nature is straight from the hand of God, uncorrupted by civilization and domestication”, he once wrote – and many of the scientists and ecologists fighting against climate change have been directly inspired by Muir’s writings and work.

Crafts / Activities

**Lydia Pattern Designs**

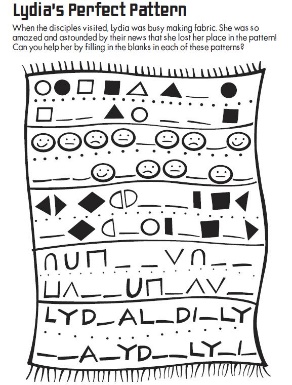
**(Ages 3+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Crayons/Markers/Colored Pencils

Instructions:

* This craft works for all ages since the complexity of patterns can vary – encourage kids to follow a pattern at the top – or make their own!

**Lydia Pattern Puzzle**

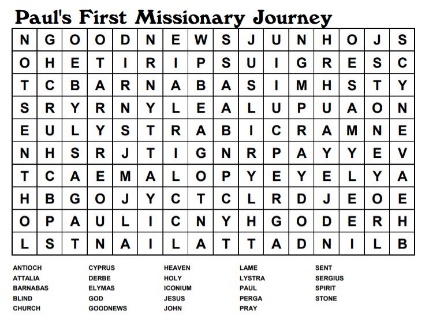
**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Marker

Instructions:

* This puzzle might still trip up younger kids, but the goal is to identify patterns and draw the correct shape

**Paul’s Journey Word Search**

**(Ages 7+, 10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Marker

Instructions:

* This word search doesn’t involve Lydia in any way (sad!), but it does capture some of the wider journey that Paul was on to different cities and places throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Biblical Background – Lydia[[1]](#footnote-2)

The account of Lydia’s conversion is fascinating in many respects, but it also serves as an intriguing window into how Gospel writers may have assembled their texts! You wouldn’t notice it when you read the passage in isolation, but the Lydia passage begins a fascinating mystery within the Book of Acts: several passages use first-person “we” language rather than the typical third-person omniscient narration that characterizes the vast majority of Acts. For example:

* Acts 16:1 – “Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman…”
* Acts 16:11 – “We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days”.

The prevailing theory is that Luke likely had access to a first-hand travel journal of one of Paul’s travelling companions and simply copied passages from the journal into the overall arc of the history he was writing – but opinions on this topic vary. Some have claimed that the writer of Acts must have experienced these events himself, but if that were true then the constantly shifting perspective from Acts 16-28 doesn’t really make sense.

Also bizarre is the extended description of Philippi’s status as a district of Macedonia and a Roman Colony. The description seems to assume that the reader hasn’t heard of Philippi, but it was a reasonably large and well-known city at the time… so what are we to make of that? Given Luke’s otherwise impressive knowledge of Greco-Roman cities, it seems likely that he is quoting an earlier source rather than offering a fresh explanation to his audience.

Barring a truly remarkable archeological discovery, the “we” passages will remain a mystery lost to time – but it is fascinating to imagine the sources (written and oral) that Luke and the other Gospel writers had when they wrote their gospels… and it certainly makes us wish that we still had those sources today!

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)