Lydia May 5, 2024

**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: What’s your favorite color?
  + 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.**
  + 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 helped start a church in her house – 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 / Activity**

* **Take some time to welcome / get to know the kids!**
  + What is your favorite color, or what color do you wear a lot?
  + What makes someone a good teacher? How do your teachers help you learn?

**Warm Up Game – I Spy!**

* 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!
  + 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 you can see anything purple in the room, that would be an easy way to start with a connection to our Bible passage!
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Our Bible story today is about a woman named Lydia who met Paul and decided to become a Christian and start a church in her house!
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
  + 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!
* 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!

**Bruce Reyes-Chow**

Although his story doesn’t really connect with the Prodigal Son, the Presbyterian pastor/author/podcaster Bruce Reyes-Chow has certainly been willing to break the mold of what a pastor or church looks like – and his work continues today!

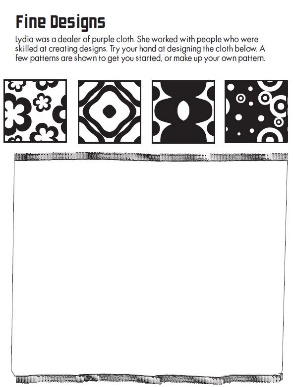
Born in 1969 in Stockton, California, Reyes-Chow grew up in a congregation that had formed to help support Filipino immigrants and farmworkers. After graduating from college with degrees in Asian-American Studies, Philosophy, and Sociology, Reyes-Chow felt a call into ministry – and in 1995 he was ordained as a pastor in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

In 2000, he decided to found Mission Bay Community Church in San Francisco, a church that he describes as being geared towards young, multicultural and progressive Presbyterians. Reyes-Chow would serve at Mission Bay for 12 years, during which he began to become heavily involved in the wider Presbyterian denomination. In 2008, Reyes-Chow was elected as Moderator of the PC(USA) at that year’s General Assembly – becoming the youngest Moderator the denomination has ever elected at the age of 39.

After his time as Moderator, Reyes-Chow began exploring other avenues for leadership and soon found himself drawn to publishing and the burgeoning world of social media – becoming a strong advocate for church to not see technology as an afterthought, but as a primary place and way to do ministry. He published *The Definitive-ish Guide for Using Social Media in the Church* in 2012 shortly after he had left Mission Bay Community Church, and has since published four other books, most recently *In Defense of Kindness* in 2021.

Reyes-Chow is currently serving as a pastor in Palo Alto, California – and his faith still guides him as he continues to be an important voice for welcoming young new members into the church and expanding our understanding of what it means to be Presbyterian and a follower of Jesus.

Crafts / Activities

**Lydia Pattern Designs**

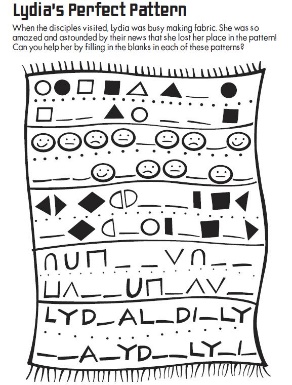
**(Ages 3+, 5 mins)**

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**

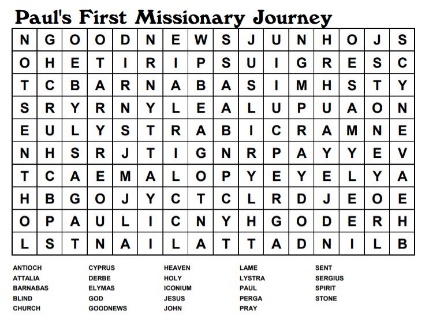
**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

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)