



OVERVIEW SECTION

How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

How to Read This Lesson Plan (defines all components of the lesson plan)

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation (a reminder of why we do this)

Scripture(s) for the Session (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)

Key Verses & Theology (background for teachers to ponder)

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

Preparation (including supplies needed)

Classroom Statement (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)

Step-by-step process of the lesson (including the scripture to be read)

Suggested variations for age groups (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture(s) for the Session: Acts 9:1-19

Please READ this aloud in every class you teach. The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

Key Verses & Theology: These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

1 Meanwhile Paul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples were Jewish. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, Pentecost came, and the Body of Christ/the Church was formed. The Church was formed within the Jewish community. This community was seen by the Pharisees as a threat. Paul was a Pharisee. And it was his job to pursue and prosecute Israelites that were participating in "The Way." Prosecution usually involved capital punishment. The phrase "breathing threats and murder" is a play on words to show that Paul was not breathing the Holy spirit (*ruach*), but an abomination. Paul was breathing the wrong air. Not the air of love, but the air of hatred. And it showed. The man was a beast. A force that, if left unchecked, would've seriously hampered, even destroyed, the newly-born Church.

8 Paul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. This is a hitting-bottom moment for Paul. This powerful righteous man has been doing things that were eating at his heart. Paul wanted to do the right thing. And he saw the church, this uprising among his people as a threat. He was doing everything possible to stop it. But what he was doing in order to stop the Church went against the essence of who he was. And those actions eventually caught up to him, and in a rather dramatic way (as hitting bottom often is). Everything that Paul thought he knew was suddenly in question. His entire world had been turned upside down. And it left him unable to trust what he'd always known to be true. And thus, he must be led by the hand to finish his journey, unsure and unseeing.

[Ananias] laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from Paul's eyes, and his sight was restored. We are not made to be alone. We are not made to function as an island of self-containment. Paul is a brilliant and driven man. But he cannot get straightened out on his own. He hit bottom on his own. His own decisions got him there just fine. But he is not able to get off the bottom without the help of others. Ananias reaches out to help Paul, even though he doesn't want to help Paul. But because he does, then Paul is able to see again.

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture: Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

Persecution – when we feel challenged, when our way of life is threatened by another way of life, and we choose to fight instead of flee, then we end up persecuting those who we feel threatened by. Paul was an upstanding citizen. But because his way was being threatened, he threatened back.

Whenever we choose to hold our ground without inviting God into our planning, then we invariably arrive at a place of persecuting those whom we fear.

Insight – On our own, we can only see and understand so much. This is what happened for Paul. He was sure he was right. Until God showed him otherwise. If we're seeking God, and asking God to help us to understand what's going on for ourselves and for those around us, then, like Paul, we start to see and understand things we never saw/understood before. When we see things for the first time, it can be unsettling and can take us some time to get used to such a perspective (like Paul getting knocked off his horse). But we will adjust, just like we do when we get a new prescription for contacts or glasses. And once we do, then we can see and act more confidently.

Conversion – When we are threatened, but we invite God into our threatened feeling, then we will eventually experience a conversion. We will experience a breakthrough. It might be a minor breakthrough with our worldview shifting only slightly. But like in the case of Paul, our entire worldview might be turned upside down. And that takes some readjustment time. But once we're readjusted to our new understanding, then we can move with confidence in the right direction.



THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: I spy books (from library); story to tell; costume to wear

Classroom Statement

This storytelling class consists of the telling of Saul's/Paul's conversion in the first person and then an activity of I-Spy using the I-Spy books as a way to demonstrate how busyness (be it on a page or in life) can keep us from seeing what's right in front of us.

Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

SHEPHERD ASKS "Question of the Day."

INTRODUCE yourself

Hi, my name is ____ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

PRAY (Short and simple is perfect)

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

TELL

- I'm going to tell you a story now.
- It's about a person who thought he knew what was the right thing to do.
- But then he had a conversion.
- This means the person changed what he thought to be true.
- Listen for what changes and why it changes for this person.

DO Storytelling

My Hebrew name is Saul. The name Saul when said in Greek, is pronounced Paul. One thing you must know about me: I like to make sure things are kept in order. I dare you to go into my house and find something out of place! You won't. Because my house is organized. I am the same way at work. I make sure things stay put, that things stay where they belong. I recently was invited to

become a Pharisee. This is a great honor! Since becoming a Pharisee, my talents at putting things back where they belong has been used greatly.

Recently, there was a Rabbi named Jesus. I never met him. Didn't hear him talk. I was busy studying under my own rabbi, Gamaliel. But I heard one of his followers speak, a man named Stephen. And what I heard Stephen say made me realize how dangerous these Jesus followers were to the Jewish way of life. And so I started to persecute these followers of Jesus. That was my job as a Pharisee.

I persecuted these followers by discovering where and when they worshipped (on Sunday mornings, before they went to work, in their homes). Once I had that information, I would arrest them, and jail them. Often times my soldiers would beat them and whip them. I don't like having that happen, since after all, they are Jewish just like me, but when people get out of line sometimes you have to do things you don't like to do in order to get the people back in line.

But there was a day when everything changed for me. I was on my way to Damascus to arrest Jews who were following Jesus. Since Jesus had been crucified, these people said that they followed "the Way." I was very excited about going to Damascus to arrest these followers of "The Way." I was so excited that I was praying to God about how I was going to arrest all of them.

And then, suddenly, BAM! I'm off my horse and lying on my back on the ground. I can't see anything but bright light, even with my eyes closed it's like I'm staring into the sun. There's a voice saying, "Paul, Paul why do you persecute me?"

And I said, "What? Who's talking to me?"

The voice says, "This is Jesus whom you are persecuting. Stop doing this."

And then the voice and the brightness was gone. But I couldn't see anything. The people who were with me take me to a house to stay at until I can see again. But my eyesight doesn't get better. So while I'm blind, I pray. I ask God what that was all about. And I do something I haven't done much of before, I sit still and I wait for understanding to come.

The first understanding comes as a vision. The vision is of an older man, a prophet, putting his hands on me, and then I can see again!

The second understanding that comes is that Jesus wasn't destroying our Jewish way of life. Instead, Jesus was fulfilling it. Making it whole. Jesus was showing us how to live the Way God has always called us, as a people, to live. Jesus was a good Jew. I couldn't see it before now. I had to lose my eyesight before I could see. I had to slow down in order to understand.

For three days, I was blind and praying. On the third day, a man came and laid his hands on me, just like I had seen in my vision. His name was Ananias. When he laid hands on me and prayed for me, I could see again! Then I asked him to tell me as much as he could about Jesus. At first he was

hesitant. He thought I was trying to trick him. But I told him I wasn't asking for names or locations of people to lock up. I was done with that job. Instead, I wanted to know more about Jesus. And so began my new job. Just like my old job, I was working to put things where they belonged. But this time, instead of trying to put people back where I thought they belonged, I was inviting anyone who would listen, Jew or Gentile, to come and participate in communities that were seeking and experiencing God as Jesus showed us to do. It's a much better job than the one I used to have!

ASK

- How do you say Paul's name in Hebrew? (Saul)
- And how do you say Saul's name in Greek? (Paul)
- What was Paul's first job? (To persecute Jews who were following the Way)
- What did that involve? (arresting people who were worshipping God in their homes)
- At the end of the story, what was Paul's new job? (to invite others to participate in communities that were seeking and experiencing God)
- Which job did Paul like better?

TELL

- For Paul, when he was working his first job as a Pharisee, he thought he knew what he was doing.
- But it wasn't until he was blinded that he was able to see the harm he was doing.
- Sometimes something can be right in front of us, but we can't see it or understand it.
- And so we need help to see again.
- Sometimes that help to see comes from knowing the bible stories, sometimes it comes from God in prayer (like with Paul) and sometimes that help comes from others.
- So we're going to open up some "I spy" books and look for the items in the pictures.
- We're going to pair up so that we're not looking alone.
- And once you find a page that seems interesting to you, stay on that page until you find the things that are suggested that you find.

DO I-spy activity

ASK

- Did your partner help you to see items that you yourself did not, could not see?
- What kept you from being able to see certain items? (there were other things on the page!)

TELL

- This is what happened with Paul, and is what happens with many of us.
- We have so many things going on, so many objects on our page of life, that we can't keep track of it all.
- And when that happens, we can make some pretty serious mistakes.
- So the idea is not to clean off the page.
- The idea is to make room for God.
- Clear some time and space to talk to God and to listen to God every day.
- God will help us see what we need to see.
- That is the Good News for today!

CLEAN UP

DISMISS FOR SINGING

Scripture story that the story is based on...Acts 9:1-19

1 Meanwhile Paul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest in Jerusalem 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way of Jesus, men or women, he could arrest them and send them to Jerusalem to put in jail.

3 Now as Paul was riding along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Paul, Paul, why do you persecute me?" 5 He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6 Get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with Paul stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. 8 Paul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9 For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." 11 The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Paul. At this moment he is praying, 12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." 13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your followers in Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to arrest all who invoke your name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel."

17 So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Paul and said, "Brother Paul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." 18 And immediately something like scales fell from Paul's eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, 19 and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and then headed back to Jerusalem.