

History Detectives: The Early Church Witnesses

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will discover what it means to be a "witness" in the early church. They will learn about key figures who shared their stories about Jesus and explore how these first "messengers" helped the church grow across the world through bravery and storytelling.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Define** the word "witness" in their own words.
- **Identify** at least two major figures from the early church (e.g., Peter, Paul, or Lydia).
- **Explain** why the early witnesses traveled to different places to share their stories.
- **Create** a "Witness Scroll" or "Report" detailing a key message of the early church.

Materials Needed

- A small "mystery box" with an interesting item inside (a toy, a cool rock, or a golden coin)
- Brown paper (or white paper colored with tea/coffee to look like old parchment)
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- A piece of ribbon or twine
- A world map or a simple drawing of the Mediterranean Sea area
- Optional: A toy microphone or a "detective" magnifying glass

1. Introduction: The Great Reveal (Hook)

The Activity: Place the "mystery box" on the table. Open it so only the student can see what is inside. Tell them they are now the only person in the room who knows the secret.

Talking Points: "Imagine you just saw something absolutely amazing—like a real-life superhero or a flying car! Would you keep it a secret? Or would you want to run and tell your best friend, your mom, and your neighbors? A **witness** is someone who sees something incredible and then tells others the truth about what they saw. Today, we are going to learn about the very first witnesses of the church who saw something so wonderful they couldn't stop talking about it!"

2. Body: The Story of the First Messengers (I Do)

The Content: Use a storytelling approach to introduce the key figures. Use the "I Do" model to demonstrate how a witness speaks.

- **What is a Witness?** Explain that "Witness" comes from the word *martys*, which means someone

who gives a report.

- **Peter: The Brave Fisherman.** Tell how Peter went from being a shy fisherman to standing up in front of thousands of people to say, "I saw Jesus, and He is alive!"
- **Paul: The Great Traveler.** Explain how Paul traveled on big ships and walked over mountains just to tell people in different cities the "Good News."
- **Lydia: The Businesswoman.** Mention Lydia, who was a witness in her own home and helped the messengers have a place to stay.

Modeling: "If I were Peter, I might say: 'I was there! I saw the miracles with my own eyes!' See how I'm using my 'witness voice'? It's loud, clear, and happy."

3. Guided Practice: Pass the Message (We Do)

The Activity: The "Telephone" Game with a twist.

1. Whisper a simple message to the student (e.g., "The Good News is for everyone!").
2. Have the student "travel" to the other side of the room (representing a new city) and say the message to a stuffed animal or another family member.
3. **Map Work:** Look at the map together. Use a finger to trace a path from Jerusalem to Rome. Say: "This is how far the witnesses had to walk or sail just to share their story!"

Check for Understanding: Ask, "Why did Peter and Paul go to all that trouble instead of just staying home?" (Expected answer: Because the news was too good to keep secret!)

4. Independent Activity: The Witness Scroll (You Do)

The Task: The student will create their own "Witness Scroll" to record the news they would share.

1. Give the student the "parchment" paper.
2. Ask them to draw a picture of one witness we talked about (Peter, Paul, or Lydia).
3. Have them write (or dictate for you to write) one "Big News" sentence. Examples: "Jesus loves you," "He is risen," or "Peace be with you."
4. Decorate the edges with symbols like a fish, a cross, or a heart.
5. Roll the paper up and tie it with the ribbon or twine.

Success Criteria: The scroll should include one name, one drawing, and one clear message that an early witness would have shared.

5. Conclusion: The Messenger's Recap

Summary: "Today, we learned that the early church grew because people like Peter, Paul, and Lydia were brave enough to be witnesses. They didn't have the internet or phones, but they had their voices and their feet to carry the story everywhere."

Review Questions:

- What does a witness do?
- Who is one person we learned about today?
- If you were a witness back then, how would you travel to the next town?

Adaptability & Differentiation

- **For Younger/Struggling Learners:** Focus on the drawing and verbalizing the "Good News" message rather than writing. Use a pre-printed coloring page of a Roman ship.
- **For Older/Advanced Learners:** Ask them to write a "Letter to the Romans" from the perspective of Paul, explaining why he is coming to visit their city.
- **Multi-Sensory Option:** Make "Hardtack" biscuits (simple flour/water crackers) to eat while talking about the long journeys the witnesses took.

Assessment

- **Formative:** Observe the student's participation during the "Telephone" game and their ability to point out locations on the map.
- **Summative:** Evaluate the "Witness Scroll." Does the drawing and message align with the history of the early church witnesses?