

27 THE WORD GOES OUT

Ryan White, a 12-year-old hemophiliac, contracted AIDS in 1984 from a contaminated blood transfusion. When the people in his hometown heard that Ryan had AIDS, fear swept through the town. Someone slashed the tires on the family car. Ryan was called a homosexual even though he had gotten AIDS through a blood transfusion. Friends and neighbors did not talk to Ryan anymore. He was not allowed to return to school. When a bullet was shot through the White's living room window, Ryan's family decided to move.

Ryan suffered from the disease of AIDS, but he suffered even more from being shut out and abused by those who had been friends. In 1987 Ryan and his family moved 25 miles away to a different town. When he arrived there, the doctors gave Ryan only a few months to live.

One day a young woman named Wendy came for a visit. She explained that she just wanted to meet Ryan because she felt he was so brave. At first, Ryan was suspicious, but they became close friends.

Soon after Wendy's visit, others came. The superintendent and the principal of the school welcomed Ryan into their school. Special classes on AIDS were held for all students and parents so they could understand and feel comfortable with Ryan and the illness he suffered.

The physical and emotional effects of Ryan White's warm welcome to his new town were miraculous. His weight and overall health improved, but in the spring of 1990, Ryan died of complications from AIDS.

3 STATEMENTS

- Jesus commanded his followers to take the gospel to all people.
- The first Christians left stirring examples of spreading the gospel to all nations.
- When Lutherans study the Commandments, the list of rules suddenly changes into a series of mission opportunities.

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Source

GOING ON FROM HERE

If you had been Jesus' disciple and had been present for the marvelous Pentecost experience, you might have wondered, "What next?" Then you would have thought back to Jesus. You would have remembered how he was taken up into heaven to be with God (Acts 1:1-11). You would have remembered what he told you to do in the power of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:18-20 holds the most familiar form of Jesus' words on the direction the disciples were to go. It is called the Great Commission.

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.'"



Jesus commanded his followers to take the gospel to all people.

At least one thing is clear from this passage. *Jesus commanded his followers to take the gospel to all people.* Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." This was something new.

All through Israel's history, people of different nations had seen that Israel worshiped a faithful and loving God. The prophets said that all nations would come to the God of Israel. One such prophecy is in Isaiah 11:10 where the prophet said, "On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious." Many people of different nations did come to worship the God of Israel.

But in Jesus and through the disciples, the tables were turned. No longer would people seek God; God would seek

them. God's reign would spread across the whole earth. The good news sought out people in order to save them.

In your own words, what does it mean to "make disciples"?

Jesus said these new disciples must all be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Think back to Session 18, about Jesus' baptism. Remember that John's baptism was done as an appeal to God for mercy on the day of judgment. John said another was coming after him who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. That was Jesus. Check the following statements that you think are true.

The first Christians left stirring examples of spreading the gospel to all nations.

- _____ 1. Being baptized in the name of the Father means believing God has claimed you like a parent claims his or her children.
- _____ 2. Being baptized in the name of the Son means that you believe Jesus is the Son of God.
- _____ 3. Being baptized really isn't important at all; it's whether you live a good life.
- _____ 4. Being baptized in the name of the Holy Spirit means that you believe in the Holy Spirit as God's presence among believers.
- _____ 5. Being baptized is for a year at a time, and really should be renewed.
- _____ 6. Being baptized is for life, so those baptized should be careful not to rush into it without planning to commit their lives.
- _____ 7. Being baptized marks you as a Christian.

What do you think Jesus meant when he said he would be with his followers until the close of the age?

ALL WHO BELIEVED

The disciples began the joyful task of living the Great Commission right away. From the very first day that God gave the gift of the Spirit, the disciples preached the good news, baptized in the name of Jesus, and taught the people what Jesus commanded. Read a description of the early church recorded in Acts 2:42-47 and answer the questions that follow.

1. Luke said that the Great Commission happened in four ways. List them below.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

2. In what ways are each of these four things still happening in your congregation?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

3. What happened to the community of those who believed in Jesus and lived out the Great Commission?

In the Great Commission Jesus directed the disciples to teach all that he had commanded them. Teaching meant more than to simply teach *about* the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Teaching Jesus' commands meant that those who believed were to follow Jesus' way of the kingdom of God. It was a way of life as seen in the description in Acts 2:46-47.

Following Jesus means for you to live in loving community with others. It means to have concern for the poor, sick, and suffering. It means to be careful with one another. It means to receive forgiveness and to graciously speak forgiveness to others.

PAUL: APOSTLE TO THE NATIONS

The first Christians left stirring examples of spreading the gospel to all nations. One of these apostles, Paul, was perhaps the greatest missionary the church has ever known. But first, he had to hear the good news for himself.

Before he was known as Paul, his name was Saul. Before he was a Christian, he hated Christians. Saul was a Pharisee who opposed the message about Jesus. He was convinced that Jesus was a false prophet. For Saul, the Christian message was an insult to God. Saul and others thought Christianity had to be wiped out. Saul persecuted Christians and brought them to trial. But one day he changed his mind. Read the story in Acts 9:1-31.

1. What did Saul see and hear as he journeyed to Damascus?

2. How did Saul's experience correspond to the experience of the men traveling with him?

3. What is the significance of Saul's inability to see after this?

Put yourself in Saul's place. You have worked extremely hard to do what you thought was right in the sight of God. Now you have learned firsthand from Jesus himself that you have been wrong! You have been God's enemy!

4. How do you think Saul felt after hearing this?

5. Why do you think it might have meant a great deal to Saul when Ananias, a follower of Jesus, called him "Brother Saul"?

6. What happened to Saul according to verse 18?

7. What was the reaction of people who now heard Saul saying in public that Jesus was the Christ?

The risen Christ appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus about A.D. 35. Right after that Paul preached in Damascus, but then went into the desert. In Galatians 1:18, Paul wrote that he went to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, where he met Peter for the first time.

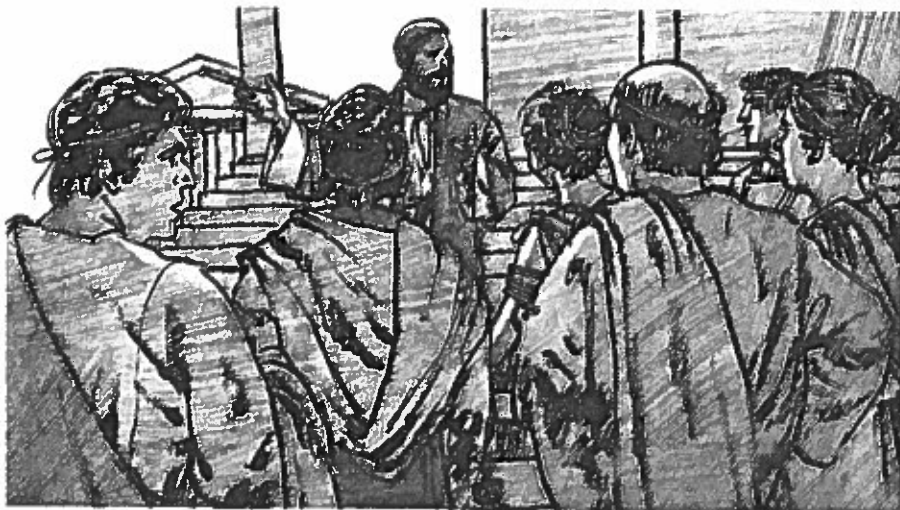
The years between A.D. 37-43 are the lost years of Paul. It is thought that he went into retirement in his hometown of Tarsus. Perhaps this was because the church did not support Paul's preaching. Then sometime around A.D.

44 or 45, Paul's friend Barnabas convinced Paul to come out of retirement. Barnabas asked Paul to join him in the work of the congregation at Antioch.

In A.D. 45 or 46 Paul and Barnabas made a visit to Jerusalem on behalf of the Antioch congregation. They came bringing food and money for the famine-struck congregation. From that time on, Paul was seen as a missionary of the church.

Paul's first missionary journey of about three years began in A.D. 47. He was accompanied by Barnabas and young John Mark on travels that took them into Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Over the course of the next 16 years, Paul set out on three missionary journeys. Paul's active mission work ended with one final journey to Rome. This final journey to Rome, however, he undertook in chains after being in prison in Jerusalem for two years. It is thought that Paul was put to death in Rome in A.D. 63.



A CHANGED HEART

Paul was not the only one witnessing to Jesus Christ. The other disciples also had gone out with the good news. Some went south into Africa. Thomas, tradition says, went east as far as India. Others remained in and around Jerusalem.

Paul's mission career was preserved by Luke in the book of Acts and by Paul's own writing. Peter's mission career also was preserved by Luke and Peter's own writing.

Unlike Paul, Peter had been a disciple of Jesus from almost the very beginning. In many ways Peter was the leader of the disciples, the one whom the others looked to for direction. Peter remained in Jerusalem after Jesus' resurrection and headed the church's mission there among the Jews. Peter was convinced that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the promises God had made to the people of Israel. In fact, Peter thought that in order to be a follower of Jesus, a person had to become a Jew first.

Like Paul, something amazing happened to Peter to change his mind and to change the course of human history since then.

In Acts 10, Luke wrote about a Roman military officer named Cornelius who came to faith in the God of Israel. One night in a dream he was told that his prayers had been answered. He was told to send some of his men to find the man named Simon Peter.

The next day, Peter was praying and he too received a vision from God. Read a description of Peter's vision in Acts 10:10-16.

1. What do you think is the meaning of Peter's unusual vision from God?

Through this vision, Peter knew that he should not avoid Cornelius. But Peter still needed to hear what the angel had said to Cornelius. When he had heard from Cornelius himself, Peter realized that the barrier between Jew and Gentile should no longer be allowed to stand. God had already taken it away. When Peter realized this, he began to tell everyone—Jews and Gentiles—about Jesus. In those moments the good news of the gospel came for the first time to those outside the people of Israel. The Christian faith made the first step toward proclaiming this news to all nations.

2. What happened to the hearers before Peter had even finished? (See verse 44.)

When Lutherans study the Commandments, the list of rules suddenly changes into a series of mission opportunities.

FURTHER

opportunities

Mishna minutes

Read Acts 9:1-22. Learn the story of the apostle Paul's conversion well enough to write it in your own words. This story is one of the most important stories in the gospel-spreading mission of the church. It shows God's pure grace in calling people through the gospel. Paul's story shows the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives to the way God intends. You also may wish to memorize Matthew 28:18-20.

Activity 1

Find out from your pastor or teacher the names of the countries in which your church body has missionaries stationed. Select one country. Write a one-page report about

Shaping life

MISSIONARY COMMANDMENTS

When many people look at the Ten Commandments, they see a list of things that *have to be done*. When Lutherans study the Commandments, the list of rules suddenly changes into a series of mission opportunities. Underline the phrases below that present mission opportunities for you.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not kill.

What does this mean for us?

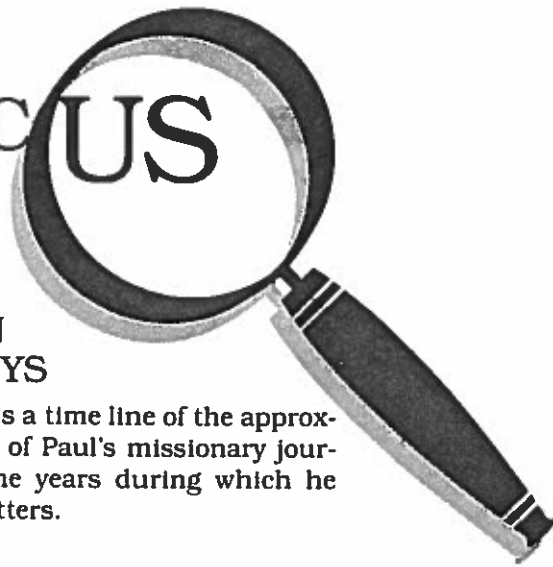
We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

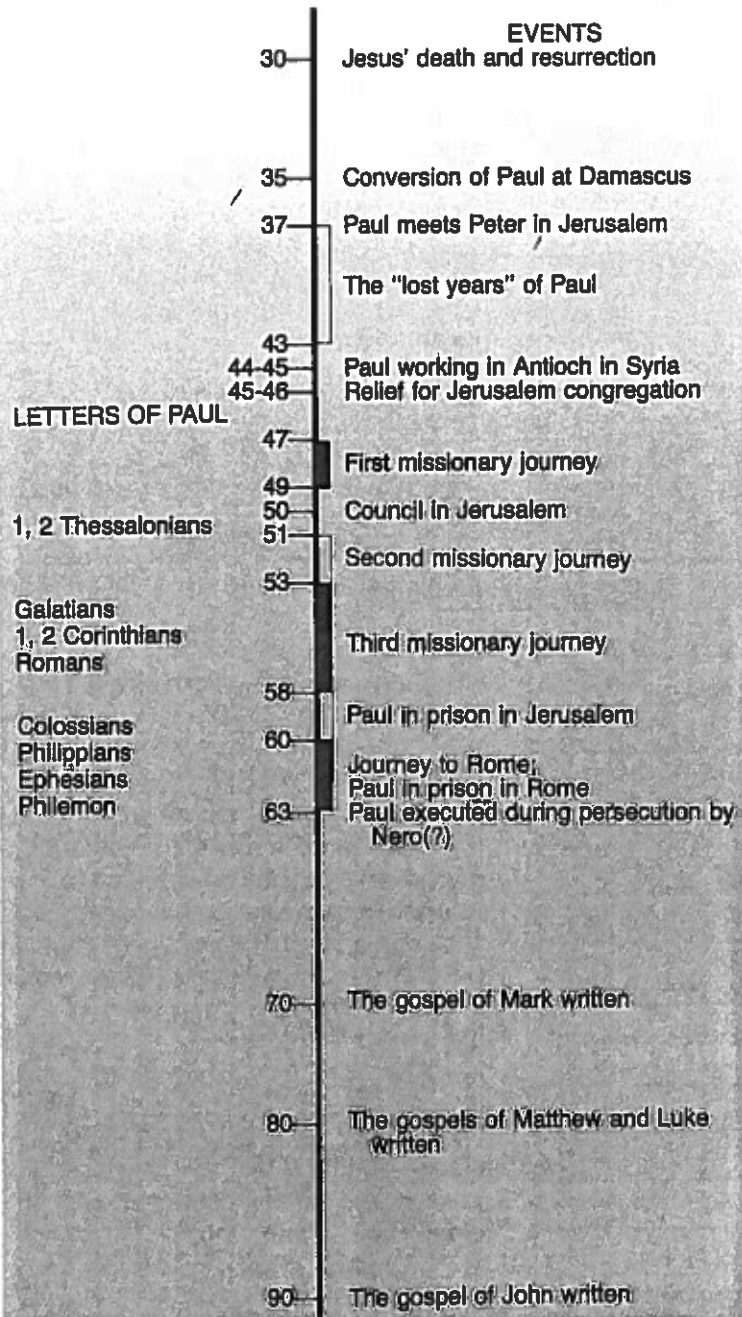
What does this mean for us?

FOCUS



ON PAUL'S MISSION JOURNEYS

Below is a time line of the approximate dates of Paul's missionary journeys and the years during which he wrote his letters.



your church's mission work there. Find out the name of a missionary stationed in that country and write a letter of encouragement. You also may wish to ask the missionary for the name of a student your age with whom you could become pen pals.

Activity 2

Make a map of the new mission congregations your church body has started in your own country within the past five years. Ask your pastor or teacher to help you find this information. Display your map so others may see the work of their church.

Activity 3

Think of at least one person to whom you can be a witness to Jesus Christ this week. Plan to speak with that person during the coming week. If you need help in knowing what to say, ask your pastor or teacher.

We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.

INTENTIONAL WITNESSING

Every Christian is a witness. Each of us represents Christ to the world. We may do this well, or not so well. In recent years, the term "intentional witnessing" has come into use.

Read the following story and discuss how Rashawn could be a witness to Anna in an intentional way.

Rashawn was invited to stay one Saturday night with her friend Anna. Anna and her family do not attend any church, but Rashawn is an active member of her church. In talking about the overnight, Anna said, "We can stay up as late as we want. We can even sleep until noon!"

Discuss together ways Rashawn could be a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to Anna and her family.