

# James is Transformed by Jesus (Forever Changed Lesson #1)

It's a great reminder that not only did Christ's resurrection make all the difference for our own faith, but even those who personally knew him on earth were drastically changed when he came back to life. In this first lesson of the new series, "Forever Changed," children will learn how James was miraculously changed by Christ's resurrection.

**OBJECTIVE:** To outline the difference it made in James' life when Jesus was resurrected.

**MAIN IDEA:** James, was incredibly changed by Jesus' resurrection. We too should serve God in a way that shows others we have been changed because of our relationships to Christ.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:** *Matthew 13:55-56, 1 Corinthians 15:7, Acts 12:16-17, Acts 21:18-19, James 1:1, James 4:17*

**OPENING PRAYER:** "Lord, help us learn from others and choose obedience to your word. Thank you for dying for our sins and giving us victory over death through your resurrection. Amen."

## **Lesson**

Explain to the class that today's lesson will address how James was forever changed by Jesus' resurrection. Read *Matthew 13:55-56*.<sup>55</sup> "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses,<sup>[a]</sup> Simon, and Judas? <sup>56</sup>And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?" Ask, "Who was James (one of Jesus' half-brothers)? What else is interesting about these verses (Jesus also had half-sisters)?" Comment that "James" was a common name during Jesus' time, so there were also two disciples named James. Say, "We can conclude that James the brother of Jesus was not a believer because this is the only place in the bible where his name is mentioned before Jesus' resurrection." Read *1 Corinthians 15:7*. "After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles." Ask for a volunteer to state what happened and apparently changed James's heart (Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection). Comment, "Christ specifically appeared to his earthly brother, James! This

event must have been the turning point in James' life." Suggest to the class to write words such as "unbelief" or "amazed" on their craft circles.

1. Next, tell the class there is much evidence of James' changed heart after Jesus appeared to him. Briefly discuss who Peter was: one of the twelve disciples, a close friend to Jesus, a leader of the church, etc. Then say, "In *Acts 12* Peter miraculously escaped from prison and spoke about James. Let's read *Acts 12:16-17*." <sup>16</sup>Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened *the door* and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup>But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place." Ask the children to think about why Peter would have mentioned James when he hadn't even been around before Christ's crucifixion (e.g. because they must have become friends and fellow leaders). Comment, "Something changed in James, and he apparently became a leader of some sort because Peter mentioned him by name! Let's dig deeper to see what kind of leadership role he had obtained." Read *Acts 21:18-19*. <sup>18</sup>On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup>When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." Tell the class that we know James became the lead pastor of the Jerusalem believers (church) because Peter specifically addressed his name with "and the elders" (a sign of James' leading position)! Comment, "How awesome is it that James, a former unbeliever and the very half-brother of Jesus, became the lead pastor of the Jerusalem church?! He definitely had a change of heart." Then suggest the children write "responsibility" on the "AFTER" craft circle because we are all expected to serve God when we become believers.

Lastly, ask the class if they know which book of the bible was written by James (the book named after him). Say, "The book of James gives much wisdom on how to live as a growing and strong Christian." Read *James 1:1* to address his humble claim as a servant and the example he sets for all of us. James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:

Lastly, read *James 4:17*. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin." Comment, "James knew that knowing to do the right thing but choosing to do the wrong thing instead would only hurt our faith. We honor Jesus' sacrifice when we obey God's word." Ask the class if anyone can think of more words to list on either the "BEFORE" or "AFTER" craft circles (such as prideful, humble, etc). Remind the children that Christ's resurrection defeated sin and death so we should live differently, like James did, because of the difference it has made on our lives.

2. Lastly, ask the children to set the two craft circles in front of them and think about which side they are on. Say, "Becoming a believer in Jesus doesn't mean we are perfect and we'll never feel unhappy again. However, if you have never had a heart change – like James – then I invite you to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ." Outline the saving, gospel message and mention that the punishment for our sins (apart from Jesus Christ) is a forever separation from God and an eternity in hell. Advise the children to speak to you or another Christian adult today if they have questions about their salvation. Advise the children to flip the faces back and forth when contemplating how we should be different because we know Jesus.

### **Hangman Game: "I've Been Changed"**

Preparation: Write or type the following prompts on paper. Then cut the prompts out, place them in the paper lunch bag, and shake the bag to shuffle.

1. Going to church
2. Reading the bible
3. Praying
4. Giving to others
5. Helping my friends
6. Obeying my parents
7. Saying kind words
8. Telling others about Jesus

Explain that we are going to play "I've Been Changed" hangman, and volunteers will write enough spaces on the board for the phrase they pick from the bag. Class members will then take turns calling out letters until the hangman is either complete or the correct answer is guessed. The person who correctly guesses the answer receives the next turn. Remind the children that because of Jesus' resurrection and because of our relationships to him we should behave differently than unbelievers.

### **Conclusion**

RECAP: James, Jesus' own brother, was miraculously changed because of the resurrection. We too should use the gifts God has given us to tell others about Jesus and serve him.

CLOSING PRAYER: "Lord, we know we are changed because of the resurrection. Help us follow James' example of dedicated and faithful servanthood. Amen."

# John is Transformed by Jesus (Forever Changed Lesson #2)

John had a very close relationship with Jesus as one of his most trustworthy disciples, but even he made mistakes! In the second lesson of the series, "Forever Changed," children will learn how Jesus turned John's prideful moments into humble lessons for the future. In addition, John continued to be a leader of the believers after the resurrection and his evident and humble heart change is visible through his writings.

**OBJECTIVE:** To outline how Jesus' resurrection made a difference in John's life.

**MAIN IDEA:** John was one of Jesus' trusted friends, but even he had moments of sin that Jesus corrected. The resurrection increased John's humility, and he became a leader of the early church.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:** *Matthew 17:1-3, Mark 14:32-34, Luke 9:49-50, Mark 10:35-45, John 20:1-10 & 30-31, Revelation 1:1-2 & 9*

**OPENING PRAYER:** "God, help us learn from the disciple John and choose obedience to your word. Thank you for dying for our sins and giving us victory over death through your resurrection. Amen."

**ICEBREAKER REVIEW AND DISCUSSION:** Say, "Last week we learned how James' became a believer after Jesus personally appeared to him when Jesus came back to life. James then became the leader of the Jerusalem church. Today we are going to learn how Jesus' resurrection affected the disciple John, one of Jesus' closest friends." Ask the children to comment on what they already know about John (he was a fisherman, he had a brother named James, he wrote the books of John and Revelation, etc) and make a list on the board. Say, "John had a great reputation of being obedient to God, but we will see that even he was changed from the inside out when Jesus was resurrected."

## **Lesson**

\*Consider writing each scripture passage on an index card and giving each child a reference to read in order to involve more people in the lesson discussion.

1. Make the distinction that the gospels speak a lot about John the Baptist, but today's lesson is about John the disciple. Read *Matthew 17:1-3* (the transfiguration) Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; <sup>2</sup>and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. <sup>3</sup>And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. and *Mark 14:32-34* (Gethsamane) Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here while I pray." <sup>33</sup>And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. <sup>34</sup>Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, *even* to death. Stay here and watch." Ask, "How many disciples did Jesus take with him to both of these events (three)? What clues about John's character do we learn from these scriptures since Jesus chose to include him in both events (that he was trustworthy, reliable, a vital leader among the disciples, etc)?" Explain that it's clear John had a close relationship with Jesus, but he also had moments of pride that brought on the Savior's correction.
2. Read *Luke 9:49-50*. Ask for a volunteer to explain why it might have bothered John that someone else was driving out demons in Jesus' name (e.g. because the other person wasn't as close to Jesus). Comment, "Jesus told John to leave the man alone because, '*whoever is not against [us] is for [us]*.'" What does that statement mean (other believers have the same rights and authority to be used by God)? Apparently John had a little bit of pride inside his heart because he was one of Jesus' friends." Acknowledge that we also need to guard against pride and jealousy when other believers are successfully used by God.
3. Next, read *Mark 10:35-45* and give a brief summary of the passage. Ask the children to comment about what seems silly or immature about John (and James') request (they asked for something selfish, they did it behind the other disciples' backs, they claimed they could handle what Jesus would go through, etc). Ask, "What was Jesus response to John and his brother (that it wasn't his decision to make who would sit next to him in heaven)? What happened when the other disciples found out about their request (they were upset)? How did Jesus handle the conflict and what did he teach the disciples (he gathered them together and reminded them that they were to follow his example as a servant)." Compare Jesus' response to that of a teacher or parent: When several children are upset, it's helpful to bring them together for correction and give them a reminder of expectations. Lead to the final part of the lesson by saying, "But we will see a growth in John's humility after Jesus' resurrection. He learned from Jesus' lessons on earth and became a servant-leader within the early church after the resurrection."
4. Ask the class to listen as you read the account of the empty tomb found in *John 20:1-10* (identify John as "*the disciple Jesus loved*"). Ask, "What did

John do in this passage (outran Peter and reached the tomb first but didn't go in, saw and believed after he followed Peter into the tomb)? What did John see that helped him believe (the cloths that had been wrapped around Jesus)?" Talk about John's hesitant reaction to the empty tomb and ask the children to comment on how they may have reacted. Tell the class that Peter and John continued their friendship throughout the book of *Acts* where they continually preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and healed the sick, even while facing imprisonments and other trials. Say, "John wrote the books of John, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Revelation after Jesus' resurrection, and there is apparent humility in his writings." Lastly, read *John 20:30-31* and *Revelation 1:1-2 & 9*. Ask, "Who received credit for John's writings (Christ)? What was John's purpose in writing (that others would believe and be assured that he shared in their sufferings)?" Reiterate the transformation of John's heart from subtle pride to incredible humility after Jesus' resurrection.

### **Conclusion** (5 minutes)

RECAP: John was a close friend and confidant of Jesus whose inward pride turned into outward humility after the resurrection. We too should cling to the wondrous hope that Christ's resurrection gives and dedicate our lives to spreading the message of Jesus' victory over death!

CLOSING PRAYER: "Lord, we know we are changed because of the resurrection. Help us follow John's example of humble and faithful servanthood. Amen."

## Mary Magdalene is Transformed by Jesus (Forever Changed Lesson #3)

Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus' closest followers and friends. Her incredible conversion to Christ is evidenced throughout the gospel through committed and faithful service. In this third lesson of the "[Forever Changed](#)" series, children will learn how Christ's resurrection gave Mary Magdalene increased boldness and dedication to the Lord.

OBJECTIVE: To outline how Jesus' resurrection made a difference in Mary Magdalene's life.

MAIN IDEA: Mary Magdalene was a committed follower and friend of Jesus Christ. She witnessed important events regarding Jesus' death and resurrection and used her experiences to share the gospel and serve others.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: *Luke 8:1-3, Mark 15:37, 40-41 & 47, John 20:1-2 & 11-18*

OPENING PRAYER: "God, help us learn from Mary Magdalene and choose obedience to your word. Thank you for dying for our sins and giving us victory over death through your resurrection. Amen."

ICEBREAKER REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION: Say, "We have discussed how James (the brother of Jesus) and John (one of Jesus' closest disciples and friends) were changed by Jesus' resurrection. Today we are going to look at how Mary Magdalene, another friend of Jesus, was changed by his resurrection." Ask the class to state any knowledge they may already have concerning Mary Magdalene (she witnessed Jesus' death on the cross, she discovered the empty tomb, etc). Then ask for a volunteer to read *Luke 8:1-3* to learn about Mary Magdalene special role as a believer. Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, <sup>2</sup>and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him<sup>[a]</sup> from their substance. ' Comment, "Isn't it amazing that someone who was demon possessed later became an active servant of Jesus and the disciples?! Mary had quite a testimony, and we will learn from today's lesson that her commitment to the Lord continued after Christ's resurrection."

## Lesson

1. First, tell the class that "Mary" was a common name in Jesus' day, but the title "Magdalene" means "from Magdala" (a village near the Sea of Galilee) and helps us identify her unique presence within scripture. Then explain that Mary Magdalene witnessed some significant events that even many of the disciples didn't even experience. Read *Mark 15:37 & 40-41 & 47*. Ask, "What two major events did Mary witness (Jesus' death on the cross and his burial)? How did her presence display her love for Jesus (because she stayed near him even though many others had abandoned him, she risked her own life by being associated with him, etc)?" Discuss how hard it must have been for Mary to continue her service even though it was unpopular and caused her immense grief. Say, "God doesn't want us to fear worldly consequences for our faith. Mary shows us that even though struggles and sadness come into our lives, we can trust that God is still in control and we can continue serving."
2. Next, read *John 20:1-2*. Ask, "What additional events did Mary Magdalene experience (she was the first to find the empty tomb and then Jesus personally appeared to her after his resurrection)? What did Mary think had

happened to Jesus' body (that someone had taken it)?" Express that Mary's reaction was typical even though Jesus had told his disciples he would be raised from the dead because she was overcome with grief and emotionally overwhelmed. Then read *John 20:11-18*. Ask, "What sticks out to you about this passage (Mary saw two angels who spoke to her, she didn't recognize Jesus at first, she was the first to see Jesus after he was resurrected, etc)? What did Mary do after Jesus appeared to her (she told the disciples)?" Emphasize that Mary responded to her encounter with Christ by immediately telling others he had been resurrected.

3. Ask, "So what should we take away from Mary Magdalene's life and experience with Christ after his resurrection?" Openly discuss the boldness we should have in our lives to tell others that Jesus is alive. Encourage the children to read their bibles and pray every day to further explore God's unique plan for their own lives. Say, "Mary Magdalene was a normal person just like you and me, yet Jesus used her to spread the gospel and serve other believers. God also wants to use us to spread the good news of Christ's victory over death."

### **Mission Project:**

Say, "Mary Magdalene was intentional in her service because Christ had done so much for her. How can we serve others in light of what Christ has done for us?" Allow some time for the class to discuss possible mission projects and voice any interest to serve within the church. Consider making a list of suggestions for future projects. Comment, "One way we can serve others is by sending encouraging cards to others that express God's love." Provide blank greeting cards and give some written examples of appropriate greetings. Children may write short messages or draw pictures to include with the cards. Then decide as a class where the cards will be sent, such as a police station, medical clinic, or school. Say, "Serving others and sharing God's love doesn't have to be hard – even simple activities, like sending cards, will be used by God to draw others to him."

### **Conclusion**

RECAP: Mary Magdalene was Jesus' friend and actively served other believers. She was the first to find his empty tomb and see Jesus after his resurrection. Mary's sorrow over Jesus' death was turned into joy, and she boldly told others that he was alive.

CLOSING PRAYER: "Lord, we know we are changed because of the resurrection. Help us follow Mary Magdalene's example of dedicated servanthood. Also, please use the cards we signed to encourage others and draw them into a relationship with you. Amen."



# Peter is Transformed by Jesus (Forever Changed Lesson #4)

Peter was a charismatic and bold follower of Jesus. His experiences with Christ before the crucifixion were certainly climatic, but after the resurrection Peter's faith became even stronger as the leader of the early church. In "Peter is Transformed by Jesus" (lesson 4 of the "[Forever Changed](#)" series), children will learn that God also wants to use their individual abilities and strengths to tell the world about Jesus. This lesson includes both a review game of previously discussed lessons and a craft that will remind children that God has a special plan for them because Jesus is alive!

**OBJECTIVE:** To outline how Jesus' resurrection made a difference in Peter's life.

**MAIN IDEA:** Peter was a strong, committed follower and friend of Jesus Christ. He wasn't perfect, but his faith grew after Jesus was resurrected and Peter then became a very important leader in the early church.

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:** *Matthew 14:22-33, Luke 22:34 & 60-62, John 20:1-10, Acts 2:14 & 38-39, Acts 9:32-35, Acts 12:6-11*

**OPENING PRAYER:** "God, help us learn from Peter's life and choose obedience to your word. Thank you for dying for our sins and giving us victory over death through your resurrection. Amen."

**ICEBREAKER REVIEW AND GAME:**

Say, "So far we've discussed how James, John, and Mary Magdalene were changed because of Jesus' resurrection. Today we're going to start the lesson by playing a game to review what we've learned." Give each child a piece of paper and a pen or pencil and ask them to number 1-10. Then write the names "James, John, Mary" on the white board and explain to the class that they will need to write one of the names to answer each question. Say the prompts and then review the answers. (You may also consider bringing a small prize for the child who answers the most questions correctly.)

1. Who was one of Jesus' closest friends? (John)
2. Who was the first person to see the empty tomb? (Mary Magdalene)
3. Who was the preacher of the Jerusalem church? (James)
4. Who travelled and preached with Peter? (John)
5. Who saw where Jesus was buried? (Mary Magdalene)
6. Who was one of Jesus' siblings? (James)
7. Who wrote the biblical book Revelation? (John)
8. Who did Jesus personally appear to after his resurrection? (Two answers: Mary Magdalene and James)
9. Who was demon possessed before meeting Jesus? (Mary Magdalene)
10. Who was with Jesus at the Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane? (John)

## Lesson

**Say, "Today's lesson is about Peter and how he was changed by Jesus' resurrection. We've already learned a little about his experiences from the other lessons, but today we will specifically look at his unique response." Read *Matthew 14:22-33* (Jesus walks on the water)**

<sup>22</sup>Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. <sup>23</sup>And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. <sup>24</sup>But the boat was now in the middle of the sea,<sup>[a]</sup> tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

<sup>25</sup>Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup>And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear.

<sup>27</sup>But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

<sup>28</sup>And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

<sup>29</sup>So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. <sup>30</sup>But when he saw that the wind was boisterous,<sup>[b]</sup> he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!"

<sup>31</sup>And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" <sup>32</sup>And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

<sup>33</sup>Then those who were in the boat came and<sup>[e]</sup> worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

1. . Ask for volunteers to comment on what they think was amazing or unique about Peter's experience (he was the only one who dared to walk on the water, he started to sink when he got scared, it helped him realize Jesus was the Son of God, etc). Then read *Luke 22:34 & 60-62*. Ask, "What did Peter do (deny Jesus three times)? What was his response (he wept bitterly)? We know that Jesus later reinstated Peter into his ministry (*John 21:15-19*) and he had a very special role for Peter to fill!"
2. Next, talk about Peter's response to the empty tomb by reading *John 20:1-10*. Ask the children to find the verbs, or actions, which describe Peter's response (e.g. ran, went [in], saw, went [back]). Tell the class that Peter's evident boldness (when compared to John and Mary Magdalene) is a unique trait that God would later use to spread the gospel and lead the church. Say, "Why is boldness a good characteristic for a leader? Could boldness ever be a bad trait for a leader?" Candidly discuss how boldness, when led by the Holy Spirit, is a wonderful trait, but pride and arrogance can get in the way if we're not careful. Comment, "Just like James, John, and Mary Magdalene grew stronger in their faith after Jesus' resurrection, we are going to see that Peter's response is also incredible and that God used him in wonderful ways."
3. Ask three different volunteers to look up and read *Acts 2:14 & 38-39* (Peter leads the early church), *Acts 9:32-35* (Peter heals Aeneas), and *Acts 12:6-11*(Peter escapes from prison). Write the scripture references on the board and then write the summary of each passage while the volunteer reads. Say, "Peter had a special role after Jesus' resurrection as the leader of the early church and lead many people to God through preaching, healings, and other miracles. Scripture gives us the evidence that Peter had been drastically changed from someone who had denied Christ to someone who would give up everything for Christ." Emphasize that we should remember Peter's motivation to serve Christ and follow his example by persevering in the faith. Also, tell the class that we must each have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ if we want to escape the penalty of sin, and encourage the children to speak with you about salvation if they have any questions about becoming a believer.

### **"I Am Unique":**

Comment, "Peter was a very unique person who God used to fulfill a special role. Today we are going to make a craft that reminds us how we are special and come up with ways God can use our own abilities to spread the gospel and show that we're changed because of Jesus' resurrection." Instruct the

children to first trace their hand on their paper. Then they will write a characteristic that makes them unique on each finger (funny, smart, happy, friendly, athletic, musical, etc). Next, have them think about how God could use their abilities to spread the gospel and write the possibility in the palm of their traced hand. Then they may decorate their paper with stickers, markers, scrapbook paper, and other various craft supplies. Remind the class that God has a special plan for each of their lives and he'll use their unique abilities to reach others, just like he did with Peter! Say, "Because Christ is alive we need to act on our faith and show others that they can also have a relationship with him."

## **Conclusion**

RECAP: Peter was bold in his faith and God used him in amazing ways to lead the church and spread the gospel after Jesus' resurrection. God also wants to use us in unique ways to tell others that Jesus is alive and show the world that we've been changed.

CLOSING PRAYER: "Lord, we know we are changed because of the resurrection. Help us follow Peter's bold example of determined servanthood. Also, please help us remember that you made us unique and want to use us in special ways to lead others to Christ. Amen."

# Paul is Transformed by Jesus (Forever Changed Lesson #5)

Paul had a unique encounter with Christ, and the evidence of his changed heart is extraordinary!

In this last lesson of the "[Forever Changed](#)" series, children will study the magnitude of Paul's past and the power of God to turn his life around and use him to spread the gospel. They will also learn how to apply what they have learned throughout the series by coming up with biblical responses to every day situations that test our faith. Because God transformed Paul, an avid persecutor of believers, we have the confidence that we are also transformed by Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

OBJECTIVE: To outline how Jesus' resurrection made a difference in Paul's life.

MAIN IDEA: Paul was a persecutor of the early church, but then he met Jesus and he was forever changed.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES: *Acts 7:56-8:3, Acts 9:1-9 & 23-30, 2 Corinthians 11:24-29*

OPENING PRAYER: "Lord, help us learn from Paul's life and choose obedience to your word. Thank you for dying for our sins and giving us victory over death through your resurrection. Amen."

ICEBREAKER INTRODUCTION:

Acknowledge that part of being changed because we know Jesus means we will respond to situations differently than nonbelievers. Say, "We've seen how a few people in the bible responded to Christ's resurrection by serving, preaching, and witnessing. Today we're going to start by practicing our responses to everyday scenarios to show the world we've also been forever changed." Read the scenarios out loud and ask for volunteers to respond in a biblical way:

1. There is a bully at school who won't leave you alone. You've told the teacher, but the bully doesn't stop.
2. A sibling falsely accuses you of wrongdoing and you are punished unfairly.
3. The kids on your sports team secretly make fun of a teammate behind his or her back.
4. An adult tells you that praying, reading your bible, or telling others about Jesus is against the rules.
5. You always seem to be the one getting in trouble at school even though there are other kids in your class who act up too.

Reiterate that we have many examples in the bible of people who responded to tough situations in the right way, and God will give us the strength to also show others we are forever changed.

## **Lesson**

Begin the lesson by explaining that Paul's name was Saul before he became a believer. Say, "The first time the bible mentions Saul is at the stoning a Stephen, a believer who spoke in front of the Sanhedrin (the Jewish religious leaders)." Read *Acts 7:56-8:3*. <sup>56</sup>and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

<sup>57</sup>Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; <sup>58</sup>and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. <sup>59</sup>And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup>Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

## Saul Persecutes the Church

**8** Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup>And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him.

<sup>3</sup>As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.

Ask for volunteers to comment about Saul's involvement in Stephen's stoning and discuss the importance of the witnesses laying their coats at his feet (signifying his leadership). Comment, "Saul was one of the greatest persecutors of the early church, but we're going to see how he was drastically changed and used by God."

1. Preface Saul's conversion by explaining he had a one-of-a-kind encounter with Jesus after the resurrection and ascension into heaven. Say, "There is no other record in the bible of someone encountering Jesus this way! Let's read *Acts 9:1-9* to see what happened." After reading, emphasize Saul's plans to find more believers in Jerusalem and take them to prison, but then God intervened. Also discuss Saul's awareness of Jesus (calling him "Lord"), his blindness, and the inability of his friends to see Jesus. Say, "Saul was drastically changed from a persecutor of the church to a believer in Jesus!" Then explain that a believer named Ananias helped Saul recover, but there were other challenges ahead. Read *Acts 9:23-30*. Ask, "Why do you think people questioned Saul's conversion? Was it right that they wanted to find and kill him?" Help the children understand that while the other believers' reactions were understandable, God would not have been pleased with their plans to kill Saul. Say, "Saul's conversion teaches us that Christ can reach even the worst sinner. And because we are changed by the resurrection, we should do our best to accept other people of the faith even when they've made bad decisions in the past."

2. Lastly, mention that Saul was later known by Paul, perhaps because of his changed state. Ask, "Have you ever done something bad that hurt your reputation? Well, Saul certainly had many bad things in his past, so it's very likely that his new name helped others learn to trust him again." Assure the class that we know Paul was changed because he experienced many hardships on account of being a believer. Read *2 Corinthians 11:24-29*. Say, "Paul became a humble servant, and that is why we know he was changed. If the resurrection had never taken place, then Paul would have died in his sin instead of receiving salvation and eternal life."

### **Art Project: "I'm Forever Changed"**

Comment, "Paul was forever changed by his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road. We are also forever changed when we become believers." Tell the class why Christ came to earth and how to receive salvation. Then encourage the children to trust in Jesus today (if they are not already believers) to truly be changed forever. Next, pass out blank sheets of paper with the heading "I'm Forever Changed." Ask the children to think of a way they would like to show the world they are forever changed because of their relationship to Christ, such as becoming a teacher or preacher, helping the needy, or starting a prayer group at school. Then pass out the markers and crayons and ask the children to draw a picture of their chosen method. Say, "If the world can't tell that we are different because we know Christ then we will lose opportunities to tell others about him. Let's strive to show the world every day that we are forever changed!" Display the artwork in the classroom as a future reminder of the day's lesson.

### **Conclusion**

RECAP: Paul was forever changed by Jesus and gave up his life of powerful influence. He became a humble servant of God and was greatly used to spread the gospel.

CLOSING PRAYER: "Lord, we know we are changed because of the resurrection. Help us follow Paul's example of humble and sacrificial service so the world will see that we have been changed. Give us opportunities to tell others about you. Amen."