** BIBLE 101**

Unit 4: Fisher of Men – The Making of Disciples

*Paul – The Letter Writer*

**A Note to the Teacher:** Next to Jesus, the Apostle Paul is the single most influential character in Christian history. Paul’s letters comprise the vast majority of the New Testament cannon and his teachings to the early church continue to define what it means to be a follower of Jesus today.

There is much too much to learn about Paul to fit in to a single lesson. This session takes a cursory view at who Paul was and what he did. Remind students that Paul’s letters and journeys will appear in other lessons as we work through the Bible. If students have additional questions about Paul, refer them to the reference library within the classroom or invite them to speak to one of our youth, who are studying Paul at length this year.

**Gathering**

As students enter the space, gather them in a seated circle. Place a variety of Bibles on the floor in the center of the circle. **Ask, “What do we know about the books in the middle of our circle?”** Give some time for students to answer.

**Say, “You all know a lot about the Bible. Let’s start for a minute with the basics. The Bible can be divided in to two sections the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*. The Old Testament tells us about the world and how God and people interacted before Jesus. The New Testament teaches us about Jesus and about the early Jesus followers. Now, here’s a tricky question – who wrote the Bible?”**

Give time for answers. You may prompt with “Do you think the same person or people wrote the Old Testament and the New Testament?”

**Say, “The Old Testament is a collection of what were once campfire stories. They were shared for generations as oral stories before they were finally written down. The New Testament is a little different. By the time of Jesus, written language had been around for some time. The stories of the New Testament were written by many people. We aren’t exactly sure who wrote the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We think that the book of Acts was written by the same person that wrote Luke. We know that Revelation was written quite a while after Jesus died, but we aren’t sure by whom. BUT, there are some books that we have a pretty good idea who wrote them. The New Testament contains 13 letters written to early followers of Jesus and the first Christian churches by a man named Paul.”**

Open one of the Bibles and show the students the section of the New Testament that comprises Paul’s letters, beginning with Romans and running through Hebrews.

**Say, “Paul spent almost 10 years traveling the world, setting up small churches in cities along the Mediterranean and writing letters to them to teach them how to be good followers and disciples of Jesus. But who *was* Paul?**

*Read, or invite a volunteer to read, the “Who Was Paul?” article.*

**Say, “Paul was not always a follower of Jesus. In fact, as a young man, Paul persecuted, or punished, followers of Jesus. He was a very religious Jew who worried that those following Jesus were going against God’s commandments. But one day, as he was traveling to the town of Demascus, Paul had a conversion experience. He heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him and he suddenly went blind. For three days he could not see. He spent that time praying and talking to God. When his sight came back, he left his old life, and dedicated himself to teaching others about Jesus and the way of life Jesus wanted for them.**

 **Paul’s new life involved traveling from city to city teaching people about Jesus and setting up new churches. After he left, Paul would write letters to his churches. In his letters he would continue to teach people about Jesus, and about what it meant to live a Christian life. We saw that those letters now make up a big part of our New Testament of the Bible, and Paul’s teachings still teach us about Jesus and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.”**

**Letters that Teach**

Above all, the Apostle Paul is known for his letters that continue to teach new generations of Christians what it means to follow Jesus.

**Say, “As a disciple, Paul was and is best known for his letters that teach people how to follow Jesus. This morning, we are going to try our hand at writing letters just like Paul. But before we can start writing, we need to make a few decisions.”**

1. **Who are we writing to?**
2. **What might they already know about Jesus?**
3. **What 2 or 3 things do we most want to teach them about Jesus and living a Christian life?**

You may choose to answer these questions as a whole class or for each student to come up with their own audience.

Set out both lined and unlined paper, pencils, and crayons. For younger classes, students can draw pictures and dictate to a teacher what they want to tell their audience.

**Say, “Each of Paul’s letters begins with a friendly greeting, then teaches a few things about Jesus, and ends with well wishes for the audience. Feel free to add colors and pictures to help make your point. What is most important about these letters is that they teach something about Jesus to those who read them. After all, a disciple is someone who *teaches* others about Jesus.”**

As students work, offer help and ideas to keep them motivated. Students that finish quickly may write a second letter to a different audience (just as Paul wrote a number of letters to a variety of audiences).

**Closing**

When everyone has finished, have them share their letters with one another. In younger classes, share all letters aloud as a group. In older classes students may exchange their letters and pretend to be the intended audiences. How would they react to receiving this letter?

Corrie arrives to teach music at 11:20am. At that time, students gather in a seated circle near the classroom couch. If time allows, have students help cleanup before heading to choir practice.