

A Good Shepherd Early Church Story

Almost Persuaded

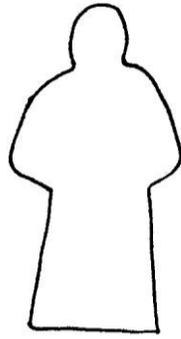
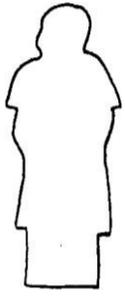
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ALMOST PERSUADED ... MATERIALS

- medium wicker basket to hold
 - wooden Paul figure
 - 2 wooden onlooker figures
 - wooden commander figure
 - wooden Felix figure



Felix



Commander



Paul

Man



Woman

ALMOST PERSUADED ... Acts 21:19-24:27

ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from its shelf Return to the circle and sit down, placing the basket next to you.

Gently stroke one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Place the Paul figure to one side of the center of the storytelling area.

Move Paul to the center of the area.

Place two onlookers next to Paul.

Touch one of the onlookers.

Touch the second onlooker.

Touch Paul as you emphasize the word "everyone. "

Speak softly, but intensely.

Drag the bottom of the Paul figure along the floor and lay him flat on the floor.

Move the commander figure next to Paul.

WORDS

Children of God, watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make it your work today or another day.

All of the words to this story of God's people are inside of me. If you will make silence with me I will find all of the words to tell you this story.

Paul spent much of his time traveling around to different places telling the people about the Good News of God's love for them. He told them that they could have a whole new life by believing in Jesus, the son of God.

But sometimes Paul came back to Jerusalem.

One time when Paul came back to Jerusalem he began to talk to the people.

Many of the people believed that the most important thing they could do was obey ALL the laws.

They believed that would bring them closer to God. They also believed that God loved the Jewish people more than other people.

But Paul told them that God had sent Jesus for EVERYONE. It didn't matter if you were a Jew or a Gentile.

The leaders of the Jewish people became very angry with Paul. They decided to kill Paul.

So they grabbed him and dragged him out of the temple and started beating him.

A Roman commander heard there was a problem. In the temple he found the people beating Paul.

Stand Paul up and touch first his arms and then his legs.

Touch the commander figure as you speak.

Gesture toward the onlookers.

Gently touch the Paul figure.

Nod your head once or twice as you say "Yes."

Move the Paul figure slightly ahead of the other wooden figures.

Lift one hand, palm upward, toward the ceiling as you speak of the light.

Gently touch Paul as you emphasize this sentence.

Touch the onlookers as you speak.

Rest your hand briefly on the commander.

Turn Paul to face the commander figure.

The commander arrested Paul and put chains on his arms and legs.

Then the commander tried to find out what Paul had done that had made the people so angry.

But they kept shouting that Paul should be killed.

Finally when Paul was about to be taken to jail he asked the commander if he could have a chance to speak.

The commander said, "Yes."

Paul stood up and told everyone about his life.

He told them how he used to kill people who followed Jesus. Then he told them about the bright light that had shown him Jesus on the Damascus Road.

But most of all he said that God had told him to go to the Gentiles, people who were not Jews.

Paul told the Jewish leaders and Roman soldiers that God loved the Gentiles too.

The people became very angry.

They shouted to the Jewish commander to get rid of Paul. They wanted Paul to die.

The commander decided he would have Paul tied up and beaten with a whip. Then maybe Paul would tell him why the people were screaming to have him killed.

But Paul asked the Roman commander, "Is it legal for you to beat a Roman citizen?" (Paul was a Roman citizen and he KNEW it was not legal!)

Move the commander slightly away from Paul.

When the commander realized that Paul was a Roman citizen he became very afraid.

Nod your head as you speak.

He knew it was against the law to beat a Roman citizen without first having a trial to find out if the person was guilty.

Move Paul to one side and place the Felix figure next to him.

Soon Paul was sent to Felix. He was the governor sent by Rome.

Shake your head as you speak.

Felix didn't believe that Paul had done anything wrong. But he wanted to make the Jewish leaders happy, so he kept Paul in jail. He still let Paul's friends come and visit him.

Rest your hand briefly on Felix.

But Felix was very curious about Jesus. So sometimes he would have Paul come and talk to him about Jesus.

Again shake your head as you speak about Felix.

Felix liked stories about Jesus and he listened to what Paul said. But sometimes Felix didn't want to hear about how God wanted people to live.

Hold up two fingers as you talk about years.

For two years Paul was kept a prisoner by Felix, the governor of Jerusalem.

Rest your hand on Paul as you speak.

After two years a new governor was appointed. His name was Festus.

Paul was still kept under guard. He was anxious to speak to the new governor. Paul thought maybe he would be set free.

Many more wonderful and frightening things happened to Paul. But that is another story for another time.

\VONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder how Paul felt when the church leaders wanted to hurt him?

I wonder why Felix asked Paul to come and talk to him?

I wonder if Paul ever thought about stopping his work as a missionary?

Carefully place the figures back in the basket, one at a time.

Without speaking, stand and return the basket to the shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Be sure everyone has had the opportunity to choose their work before dismissing the entire group.

Children of God, watch carefully as I put this story away so you will know how to handle it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Children of God, watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make it your work today or another day.

[wonder what you will make your work today? Let's go around the circle and decide what each of us will do.

ALMOST PERSUADED TEACHER HELPS

We are drawn into Paul's life vicariously in Acts. As we read and then tell the story for today we can almost imagine what it was like to be Paul. And yet the story here is somewhat convoluted. We find ourselves asking questions immediately. Why didn't Paul defend himself as a Roman citizen immediately? Why are Paul's friends allowed to visit him while he is still under some kind of house arrest?

We don't know all of the answers to those questions. We do know that Jewish sentiment was running high. When Paul preached, the Jewish leaders listened to him and found very little to be offensive. That is until Paul stated that God had chosen him to bring the Good News to the Gentiles. The Jewish leaders at Jerusalem could accept that Jesus may have been the Messiah. They might even consider following some of the teachings of Jesus. But they could NOT accept that Gentiles were given the same rights as they were. In some ways we can empathize. For centuries the Jewish people had survived by not associating with "unclean" people or things. Just because Paul came and told them it was OK for them to associate with Gentiles, didn't mean they believed it. The Jewish people had lived those centuries believing that they were chosen by God to be a special and set apart people. It made sense to them that a Messiah was sent for them. But in their understanding of their own "chosenness", they also understood that Gentiles were not chosen. Without looking too carefully we can probably find ourselves and our congregations in this story. Think of the times your church has struggled to include those who look or sound or act very differently.

Felix liked hearing about Jesus. He enjoyed his conversations with Paul. But sometimes Paul spoke of a lifestyle that demanded self-control. Felix shrugged Paul off during those times. He didn't want to hear about moral expectations. Yet Paul never stopped saying the words he firmly believed God had given him. He held high expectations for Felix and any others who listened to his message. No doubt if he had been willing to compromise his stand, he could have been freed to go about his work. But Paul would not back down, nor would he make a statement that was untrue to his beliefs to save himself

The wondering questions deal with Paul and Felix, In the first question we wonder how Paul felt when the church leaders wanted to hurt him. Was he afraid? Was he angry? Was he sad? These are probably the three most common responses you will get from children. Occasionally a younger child will say that Paul was not scared or angry or sad. These children still exhibit an almost magical belief in God to keep bad feelings away from themselves and others. It is important to allow them their thoughts. As they grow they will begin to understand that expressing fear doesn't mean that they don't trust God.

The second question wonders why Felix asked Paul to come and talk to him. No doubt the children will say that Felix wanted to know about Jesus. They may also say that Felix just liked Paul or that Felix wanted to poke fun at Paul. Remember that all answers to wondering questions are fair answers. We don't know a "right" answer. A child's belief may differ from our own, but unless that answer is diametrically opposed to your basic beliefs, it should be allowed to stand.

The third question wonders if Paul ever thought about stopping his work as a missionary. Older children who have experienced some disillusionment will probably say yes. If you ask them why, they may say that he simply got tired of being threatened or hurt. But there will also be children who believe that Paul's commitment to Jesus was so strong that he would never consider quitting until the day he died. We don't know what Paul thought; we only know that he never quit preaching the Good News until he died.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

In our story today, Paul had certain protection because he was a Roman citizen. You have some protections because of where you live. Which of those is most important to you? Do you think children or adults have more protection in this country?

In this story the people became very angry with Paul because he insisted that God's love was for all kinds of people. What experience have you had learning to accept different kinds of people? How do your parents do in accepting your friends? Why do you think we have a hard time with people who believe differently from us?

Felix sort of wanted to believe in Jesus, but he could not bring himself to make a final commitment to Christ. Why do you think that was hard for him? What about you? Have you made a commitment to be a follower of Jesus ... a Christian? What are some other things in your life to which you have a difficult time making a commitment?