

April 28, 2013

## Lesson 35: Faith Gives Identity



### Acts 15:1-18

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the

apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses.'

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.'

The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, 'My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written,

"After this I will return,  
and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen;  
from its ruins I will rebuild it,  
and I will set it up,

so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—  
even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.

Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago."

# Faith Gives Identity

Acts 15:1-8

April 28, 2013

**The Big Story Truth:** People will always try to put limits on who belongs to God. But the truth is- God's grace is always more wonderful than we can imagine! God's gift is for all people!

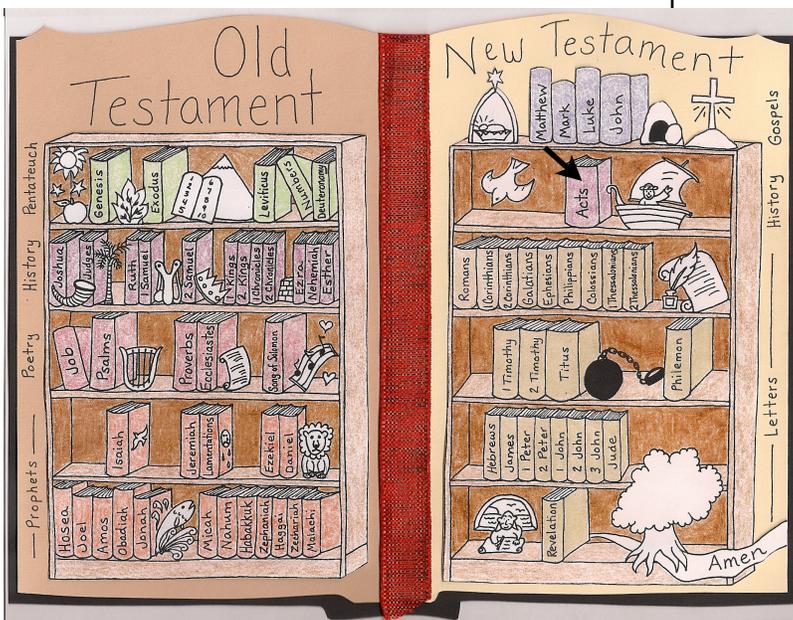
**About this Scripture Passage:** This passage continues our series of readings about life in the early Christian church after Jesus' death,

resurrection, and ascension. Here a group of church leaders is having to deal with questions about whether or not Gentiles who heard the good news of Jesus and believing should be required to be circumcised.

Circumcision was an outward sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham. Jewish boys and those who converted to Judaism were circumcised as a sign of their faith relationship with the God of Israel.

They knew they were part of the family of God because they had this sign. Jesus, the first disciples, the early church were all Jewish. So the

question as the church starts to expand to people who are not Jewish by background is whether or not they need to have this marker to define who was part of the community of God. The realization by the power of the Holy Spirit is that it is faith- God's working in human lives- that is the sign, the mark, of being part of the community of God. The gift of God that is faith is what identifies as part of the family of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.



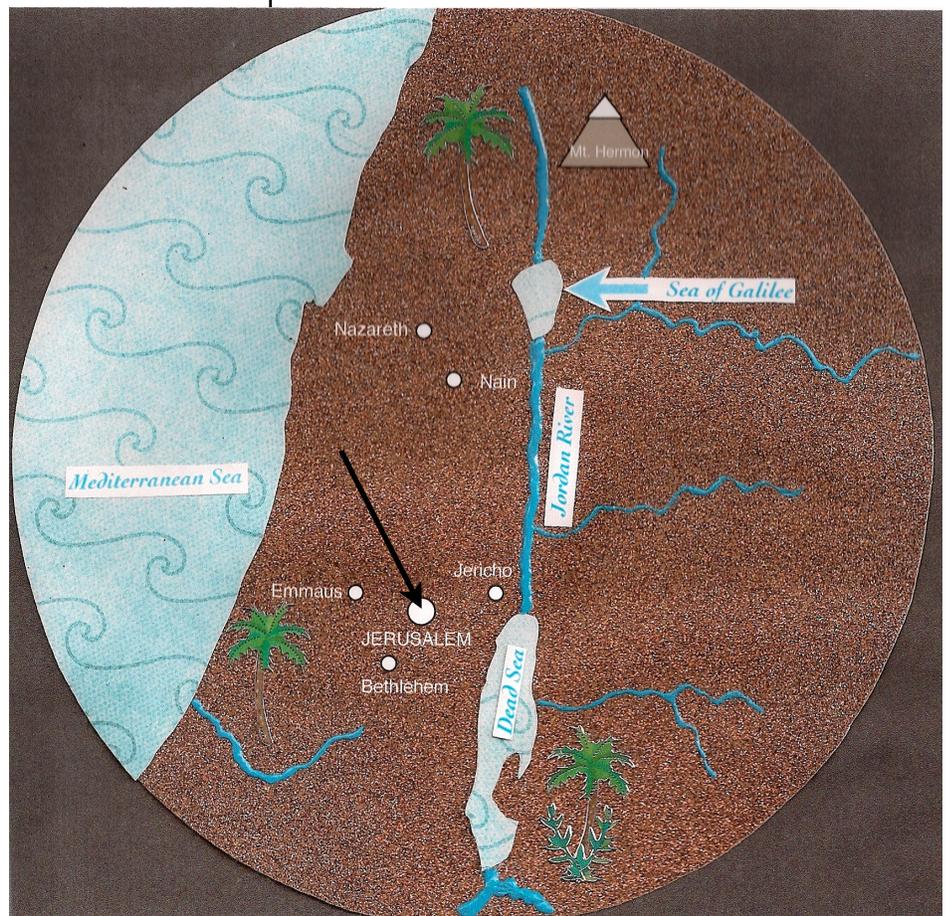
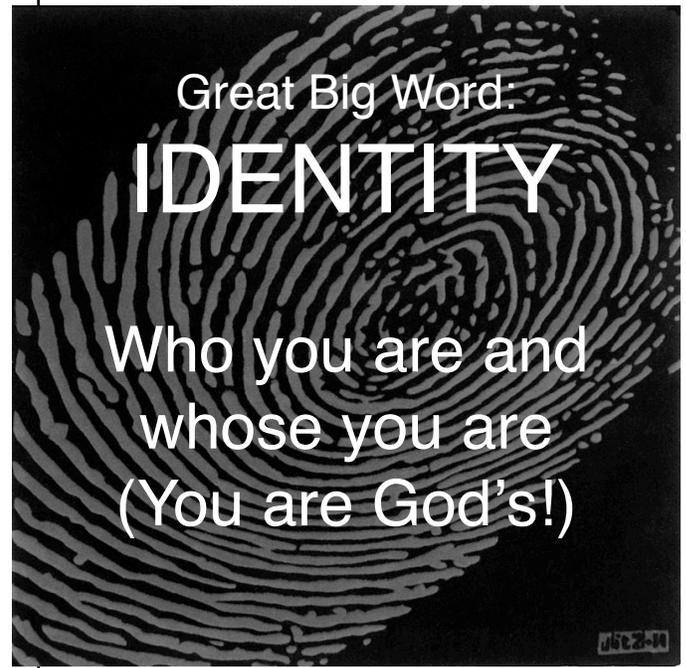
## For Your Reflection:

*How is faith a part of your identity? How do you express that? How do you see your kids expressing faith in their daily life?*

**Making the Connection:** Our kids know what it is like to belong and to be left out. A major need for our youth is to know they belong. Kids who lack the stability of community in which to belong create that in ways that may or may not be healthy. Clubs, organizations, sports teams are positive ways of getting that sense of belonging. Gangs, exclusive clicks, etc. are some of the not so great ways of meeting the need to belong. Today's story is about who is in and who is out when it comes to being part of God's family. Do you have to look a certain way to be a part of God's family? Do you have to dress a certain way? The answer is no. God wants everyone to be a part of the family. Everyone belongs here. What's important is not what is on the outside, but that God is working on the inside! This is an important message for our kids to hear as they grow into adulthood in the church. They need to know that they all belong here!

### Where in the World Are We?

In the last couple of weeks we have heard about the good news spreading out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Today, though, our story takes place back in Jerusalem as those who were among the first believers struggle to figure out how to be the church in the midst of so much new diversity in the faith!





# *Preschool and Early Elementary*

## **Materials Needed:**

- Selection of colored paper (Preschool Only)
- Smash Books (Early Elementary Only)
- Washable ink pad
- Plastic Magnifying glasses
- Child of God or Jesus Loves You stickers (2 per child)
- Cut out body shapes (1 per child)
- Markers, crayons, etc.
- Optional three dimensional craft items (yarn for hair, fabric for clothes, etc.)
- Optional glue (if using three dimensional craft items)

## **Before the Students Arrive:**

If you are doing this with an early elementary grade, set out the smash books. (When the students arrive they can choose a page in their smash books that they like best to use for this project rather than being handed a sheet of paper.)

## **Activity:**

As students enter the room (or after they have all gathered and sat down) greet each child by name and ask them what their favorite color is. Write their name on a sheet of paper corresponding to their favorite color. After each child has a piece of paper, get out the ink pad and show them how to dip their fingers in the ink pad and make their finger prints all over the piece of paper. While you work you might ask them some questions about their other “favorites.” What are their favorite animals? Favorite foods? Favorite places to visit? You can do the same with dislikes. What foods can't they stand? etc.

As you help the kids make their fingerprints say: I am so thankful for how God has made each one of you unique! You each have different things that you like and some things that you don't like. Even your fingerprints are unique. Look carefully at your fingerprints. Look at those different lines. Each and every one of us have a different pattern of finger print! (Give kids an opportunity to look at their finger prints with a magnifying glass.) God has made each of us very

uniquely. Your hair, your eyes, your smile, the things you can do, the things that you like... God has made you so special!

Set the papers aside to dry. Continue conversation with the kids about some of the unique things about themselves as you get out the body shapes and have the kids make one of the shapes look like them. If kids are stumped you can help them notice certain things about their appearance to add to the shape... but what's important about this activity is more that it looks right to the child, not what we as teachers see!

After the people shapes are decorated so that they look like each child in your class, you can get back out the pieces of paper with their fingerprints and glue or tape the child's self portrait onto his/her fingerprint page. Affirm again how delighted you are that God has made each one of them so special and unique!

### **Experiencing the Story:**

As kids are looking at their completed portrait pages, tell them that the story that we are learning about in church today has to do with who can belong to God's family. As people were sharing the good news, something started to happen. People started believing in Jesus who were different than each other. They were from different families. They lived in different places. They liked different foods. They had different ways of doing things. Their bodies looked different from one another. And the people started to wonder whether or not they all could be a part of God's family if they weren't all the same.

What do you think? Do people have to all look the same to be part of God's family? (Listen to the kids answers. Ask them to explain why they think the way that they do.)

God made each person special. God loves all of us and has made all of us part of his family! Let's add one more thing to the pictures that we've made today. Let's add a "Child of God" or "Jesus Loves You" sticker because each of us is part of God's family! We all belong to God! (Each child may also stick a sticker on their shirt too!)

Close with prayer thanking God for each child by name and that you have made them part of your family!

# *Upper Elementary/Middle School*

## **Materials Needed:**

- Phone or laptop with internet access (its likely the kids will have one of these phones!)
- One of these things is not like the other (Jew/Gentile) diagram
- Bible story handout
- Smash books
- “Jesus Loves You” or “Child of God” stickers
- Gel pens
- Tracing paper (prepared with the word “faith” printed backwards)
- Wet paper towels

## **Before the Students Arrive:**

If you have access to the internet, before class try a you tube search for “One of these things is not like other.” Click on one of the clips of Sesame Street. Usually they sing a song about one thing not being like the others while a grid of four items is being shown and then the person watching is encouraged to pick the one that is different. This is the kind of clip that the kids will be asked to look up during the lesson.

## **Experiencing the Story:**

As soon as everyone has gathered, ask kids if they ever watched Sesame Street when they were little. Give the students the assignment to find clips on you tube of Sesame Street’s “One of These Things is Not Like the Other” segments.

Watch one or two they come up with.

Now ask the kids to hum or sing the song while you play your own version of the game. Set out the grid of the “Jew/Gentile” game. When you have finished humming, be as sappy as you can in asking the kids to pick out the one that is not like the others.

Tell the kids that today’s lesson has to do with the fact that when the good news started spreading about Jesus, it started reaching people who were not Jews. (Remember Jews are the people who were the descendants of Abraham.)

Anyone who was not a Jew was called a Gentile. Jesus and his disciples were all Jews. But many of the people who heard the good news about Jesus and believed that he was the son of God were not Jews.

There were some big differences between Jews and Gentiles... and that became a big controversy that the early church had to deal with. That's what we are going to learn about today.

Distribute copies of the Bible Story handout. Ask one or two students to read the story out loud. (Just a heads up- there will probably be some snickering. The definition of circumcision is provided off to the side, but please do not ask a student to read this out loud. It's not necessary to dwell on the definition, only to understand the part that it played in the controversy as a sign of God's covenant with His people.)

After you've read the story, do the Faith Scavenger hunt and follow the directions for a Smash book activity. When students have finished their smash book assignment, give them each a "Jesus loves you" or "child of God" sticker that they can add to their smash book page.

### **Activity:**

Say: In today's lesson we heard that its not anything we do to the outside of our bodies that marks us as a member of God's family, its the gift of faith that makes us part of God's family. Before we go today, we are going to make a reminder that what makes us belong is what is on the inside, not the outside. I have for each of you a piece of paper here with the word "faith" on it. It's backward because we are going to make our own temporary tattoos and the word will turn out the right way when its put on. Here are the directions. Design or color this image in any way that you want to with these gel pens. When you are done, we'll put them on just like temporary tattoos. (Put the writing side against the skin. Hold a wet paper towel on the back for 30-60 seconds and then remove.)

Give students time to complete their "faith" tattoo art and then apply their tattoos. Before you go, pray for each of the kids by name. Pray that as they see this word "faith" on their hands that they would remember that they always belong in God's family. Pray that they would be reminded how much they are loved and how thankful we all are to know them in all their unique beauty!

**JEW**



**JEW**



**JEW**



**GENTILE**



# Part of the Family?

Acts 15:1-17

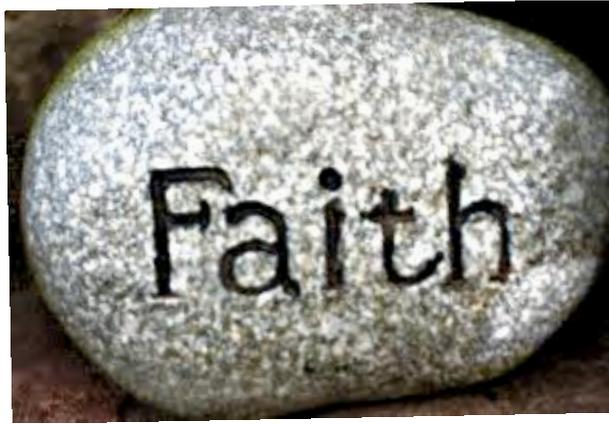
After Jesus died and rose from the dead and went into heaven, news of Jesus spread far and wide. Some people started to believe in Jesus who were not part of the family of Abraham. They were not Jews, they were gentiles (a word that meant “foreigners”). Yet, they heard the good news of Jesus and came to believe in the one true God!

But that led to an argument. Back a long time ago- way back in the book of Genesis when God first made a covenant with Abraham and told him that someday he would have a large family. As a sign of the covenant, all the boys were to be circumcised so that they would remember that they were a part of God’s family. So the Jews started wondering, how could people from outside their family be a part of God’s family? And if they could be a part of God’s family, then did they have to be circumcised too?

The followers of Jesus met in Jerusalem and prayed about this. God helped them to realize that God’s love is for all people from all families. And that it doesn’t matter what the outside of a person’s body looks like. The only thing that matters is that God has given the gift of faith! Because of that, even those of us who look different or live in a different place or speak a different language or come from different families--- we all belong in God’s family!

**definition:** *circumcise*

To cut an unneeded flap of skin, called the foreskin, from the penis. For the Israelites, *circumcision* was a sign of the special agreement (or covenant) they had with God: If they worshiped and obeyed Him, He would be their God and they would be His people. Abraham was the first Hebrew to be *circumcised*. After Abraham, Hebrew boys were *circumcised* when they were eight days old. Leaders in the early church said that it was not necessary for men or boys to be *circumcised* to become part of God’s family.



**Look up what the Bible says faith is and what it can do!**

Matthew 17:20

Mathew 21:21

Mark 10:52

Ephesians 6:16

Hebrews 11:1

### **Who Are You?**

Hearing this story from the book of Acts reminds us that we too are part of the family of God. All of us are unique. We have different likes and dislikes. We don't look the same or act the same. God made each of us to be unique. To be us. God gives us all the gift of faith and loves us as his own kids just the way we are.

To celebrate belonging to the family of God, make a page in your Smash book that is all about you. Be sure to make your page unique... Just as God made you!





