

On Mission For God

Theme Lesson

PREPARATION

Objective

Students will recognize how God moved through history, in spite of obstacles.

Outcomes

1. Students will understand strategies that God uses to advance his purposes.
2. Students will discover that Christians often face opposition as they partner with God to make his name known.

Directions

1. Review the theme lesson, scripture references, and response. Consider how this lesson will apply to your unique group of students.
2. Review the “Key Word Wheel,” definitions, and verses. Consider which words relate to this lesson. Suggested: “People,” “People Moving,” “Proclamation,” and “Passport to the World.”

**PREPARATION: 20 min.****TEACHING: 30 min.**

Materials

- Bibles
- “Key Word Wheel” poster (Introduction p. 6)
- “Key Word Cards” (Introduction pp. 7-8)
- “Heroes or Heretics?” riddles (p. 2)
- chalkboard or dry erase board
- chalk or dry erase marker

Heroes or Heretics?

Riddle #1

I lived in Jerusalem and was part of the early church in the book of Acts.
I preached about Jesus and did miracles among the people.
I was falsely accused and brought before the Jewish religious leaders.
I saw heaven opened and Jesus standing up at the right hand of God.
I was dragged out of the city of Jerusalem and stoned.
Who am I? (Stephen)

Riddle #2

I was born in Great Britain and lived there until I was a teenager.
At age 16, I was kidnapped and taken to Ireland.
I worked as a shepherd in Ireland.
At age 22, I escaped and returned home to England.
God used this experience to give me a love for the Irish people.
I returned to Ireland voluntarily and preached the good news of Jesus for 30 years.
I used shamrocks to teach about the trinity: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Who am I? (Patrick or St. Patrick)

Riddle #3

I am also from England.
In the 1500s when I was alive, the Bible was written in Latin.
I wanted the people of England to be able to read God's Word in the common language, English.
I translated the Bible into English.
Church leaders put me to death. They did not think that uneducated people could read and understand God's Word by themselves.
Who am I? (William Tyndale)

TEACHING (CORE)

PRE-LESSON ACTIVITY: HEROES OR HERETICS?

Directions

1. Warmly welcome students to your time of discovering more about God's purpose for the people of earth.
2. Begin by teaching your students, *"God has worked throughout history to help others around the world know him. There are many stories of brave and wonderful Christians who faced large obstacles in order to help many people, and even us today, to come to know and honor God."*
3. Invite your students to participate in a guessing game. Read Riddle #1. Offer one hint at a time. See if students can guess "who you are." Follow the same process for Riddle #2 and #3.
4. Notice the strong stands each of these people took for Christ. Define a heretic. *"A heretic is someone to stands up against the teachings of the church (not the Bible), and causes others to do so."* Say, *"Each of these people was considered a heretic by some during their lives."* Ask, *"What do you think? Are they heroes or heretics?"* Allow responses.
5. Regardless of what historians believe, they were people that God chose to work through in the history of the church for his purpose – to help the name of Christ become known and honored.

THEME LESSON: GOD HAS WORKED THROUGH HISTORY

Directions

1. *"Since the time of Christ, God has used people throughout history to advance his purposes. Stephen, St. Patrick, and William Tyndale are just a few of the courageous people who stood for God in their time period. Each of these people represents a different way, or strategy, in which God moved in history."* Write the title "Strategies" on the board. You will be making a list of five strategies under this title.
2. Under this title, write the heading "Expansion into New Territory." Then say, *"Paul was considered the apostle to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish peoples. His main purpose was the same as God's purpose: to help people of all nations come to know him."* Read Romans 15:20, *"It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation."* Then say, *"Paul was always moving on to new places. This emphasis on new territory represents a kind of missionary strategy that still exists today. Missionaries to the 'unreached' focus on peoples who have never heard the gospel."*
3. Under the first heading, write "Martyrs." Then say, *"Many Bible scholars believe Paul was martyred in Rome. Down through the centuries, millions of people have been persecuted and even killed for their belief in Jesus Christ. One man wrote a long book, gathering many of these stories. It is called 'Fox's Book of Martyrs.' A recent book on martyrs is 'Jesus Freaks.' Felicitas (Lesson 5 – Theme pp. 5-9) and her sons were martyrs, killed for their faith in Jesus Christ. Today, there are still many places in the world*

Materials

- "Heroes or Heretics?" riddles (p. 2)

Materials

- Bible
- chalkboard or dry erase board
- chalk or dry erase marker
- "Key Word Wheel" poster (Introduction p. 6)

where Christians suffer or die for their faith. It is difficult to understand why God allows his children to be abused and even killed. When non-Christians observe the strong faith of believers even when they are threatened with arrest, punishment, or death, some seek the God that these people place above life itself. God's name is made known, even through martyrdom."

4. Write "Invasion" on the board. Then say, "Sometimes, the gospel spreads because of war and violent activities of governmental leaders. Patrick, as a young boy in England, was captured by a raiding party from Ireland and taken by force to their country. Patrick was forced to work in Ireland as a child laborer. This story is similar to the Old Testament story of Joseph who was taken to Egypt and sold into slavery. During his time in Ireland, Patrick came to reflect on his life and make a firm commitment to follow Christ. Though he later returned home, he prepared for ministry and returned to Ireland, the region to which he had been taken forcefully, planting thousands of churches and baptizing tens of thousands of converts. He is the one who brought Christianity to Ireland. He later became known as St. Patrick. Just as in the case of Joseph, God used a seemingly bad situation to make his name known."
5. Write "Government" on the board. Then say, "Many governments have been friendly to Christians and have allowed the church to grow. These governments have laws that allow freedom of worship. Can you think of examples?" Allow responses. Then say, "In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Paul urges believers to pray for 'kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.'" Explain. "Paul knew that God's Word spreads easily where there is no government opposition."
6. "What about non-Christian governments? In some nations or tribes, those in leadership persecute and kill Christians. There is no freedom to follow Jesus. In fact, it may be illegal to convert to Christianity. Some recent examples of restrictive governments are those in communist nations and those where there is the national religion such as Islam or Buddhism. Can God use these hostile political structures?" Allow responses. Then say, "Yes, God can make his name known, even through non-Christian governments."
7. Write "Bible Translation" on the board. Then say, "John Wycliffe lived in the early 1300s, 200 years before William Tyndale worked on his English translation of the Bible. At that time, the Bible was available only to priests and leaders in the church, those who could read Latin. John Wycliffe was the first man to work on a translation of the Bible into a local language, English. He showed extreme courage, since many wanted to persecute him and even kill him for his desire to make God's Word available and understandable to the common person. Wycliffe Bible Translators was named after John Wycliffe. Today, this mission organization seeks to translate the Bible into the 3,000 remaining languages so that all peoples can study God's Word in the same language that they speak."
8. Draw the students' attention to the "Key Word Wheel" poster. Say, "We know that God is always working to advance his purpose. Look at the words on the spokes. Do any of these 'Key Words' fit with the strategies you have

learned today?” Have students turn to two or three people sitting near them to discuss this question.

9. After about two minutes, invite students to share their findings.

IN CLOSING: REVIEW AND RESPONSE

Directions

1. Say, *“God is still working to advance his purposes today. He uses many of the strategies we discussed. What God uses most is people, Christians who follow and obey God.”*
2. *“God uses Christians who will follow him and gives them strength in both peaceful and scary situations. Remember that when Jesus gave the command for his followers to go into all the world, he also promised to be with us and give us his spirit.”* Allow students to share situations in which they are hesitant to share about Jesus.
3. Pray for your students to have boldness to share Jesus even when it is difficult.



HEROES OF HISTORY: ST. PATRICK

Directions

1. Set the stage for this story. Say, *“The place was Ireland, about 400 years after Jesus lived, died, and returned to heaven. The people of Ireland had not heard about Jesus. Instead, they worshiped nature. During ceremonies, they met at altars to offer sacrifices to the sun, water, and fire. They also worshiped idols. Patrick was returning to the land where, as a teenager, he had worked as a slave. This time Patrick stepped onto the shores of Ireland by choice – as a missionary to the Irish people.”*
2. Introduce this vocabulary word:
Druid: in ancient times, highly respected priests who used magic spells and rituals to tell the future; kings sought the advice of druids before making important decisions.
3. Read the story to your group. Ask them to consider how Patrick’s ministry in Ireland was similar to the ministry that Paul had in the first century.
4. Discuss the questions together or in small groups.
5. Together, discover the important role this person had in making God’s name known in all the earth.



PREPARATION: 15 min.

TEACHING: 25 min.

Materials

- “St. Patrick” illustration (p. 7)
- “St. Patrick Story” (pp. 8-10)
- “St. Patrick Discussion Questions” (p. 11)

St. Patrick



The Slave of Ireland and the Gospel

IRELAND, C. A.D. 432

Though more people today probably associate Patrick with green beer than the gospel, he has left us an important heritage as a revolutionary for Christ. It is important for us to remember such men as Patrick for who they were and not who the world has transformed them into.

The life of Patrick is another example of the love of God that can make no sense to the world. How can a slave love his master so much as to return for the master's good once he has escaped? How can he love the people who enslaved him and took him away from his family as a youth so much as to dedicate his life to their good? How can the persecuted love their persecutors?

Is there any greater proof of God than the existence of such a love in the hearts of those who call him Savior and Lord? Is there any greater evidence of his existence than what can be accomplished through a heart submitted and obedient to his will?

As Patrick's boat pushed west, he felt a strange chill from the memory of the same journey he had made years earlier under very different circumstances. The smells of the sea and the fog clinging to the waves and the cliffs took him back to when he was a lad of sixteen, traveling to Ireland in bonds with the raiding party that had burned his home and taken him as a slave.

Despite the hardships of having been a slave for six years, tending the herds of a Druidic high priest named Milchu, Patrick had come to have a supernatural love for Ireland. It was in Ireland that Patrick had come to know God personally as he walked the woods and mountains alone with the animals. He had grown up in a Christian home in a British Roman settlement but had never embraced the faith while he lived with his family. He had been a lax [lazy] student during that time, something he now greatly regretted, and was too independently minded to walk too easily in his family's faith. Alone and seemingly forsaken in Ireland, Patrick sought out God and found him. Then, through a dream, God led him to escape and eventually return to his family, who welcomed him warmly. Upon

his return to Britain, Patrick resumed his studies with more vigor, intending to join the ministry as his father and grandfather had.

Now, as the oars pulled against the dark waves, Patrick began to see God's hand in it all. Shortly after his return to Britain, Patrick had a dream about Ireland in which he heard "the voice of the Irish" calling to him: "We beg you, holy youth, come and walk among us again." Patrick felt this was God's call to return to Ireland with the gospel.

Yet he felt unfit for the task, so he journeyed to a monastery in Britain, again leaving his family, and poured himself into being ordained. Roughly twenty years had passed since then. At his first opportunity to return, Patrick was passed up by his church elders to be a missionary to Ireland, and another, a man by the name of Palladius, was chosen. When Palladius was killed a short time later, Patrick was elected to go.

Upon landing, Patrick returned to the village where he had been a slave. His intent was that his first convert would be the man who had been his master, Milchu. But when he arrived there, he found Milchu's home in ashes. At word of his coming, Milchu had gathered all of his possessions into his home and lit it on fire, killing himself in the flames. Patrick was horror-struck at the madness of this act and determined to act dramatically to release these people from the fear of false gods that would drive a man to do such a thing.

Patrick spent some time preaching to the locals there and finding out what had happened since his departure and who was in power. His years as a slave had served him well, as he still spoke their language fluently and with little accent, making it easy to communicate. In his conversations he learned that the high king of Ireland, King Laeghaire, would be celebrating the Druidic feast of Beltine [festival to welcome spring and ask for blessings from the Celtic gods], which coincided with Easter that year, at his courts in Tara. Patrick headed there immediately, intent on making a statement for the power of God over the idols and occult practices that bound these people.

ST. PATRICK STORY, CONTINUED

It was tradition that on the eve of the festival, it would be the high king who lighted the first bonfire of the festival. Any who defied this would be put to death. Yet as the king emerged that night to start the festival, another bonfire was already glowing brightly for all to see on the hilltop of Slane (pronounced **slay-nee**) not far away. [Patrick lit his own bonfire to celebrate Jesus' rising from the dead on Easter.] As had Elijah before the prophets of Baal, Patrick had uttered a formal challenge to the Druids and their king.

As Laeghaire gave the order for the perpetrators to be found and killed, his two Druidic high priests offered him a word of caution and prophecy: "O king, live forever. This fire, which has been lit in defiance to the royal edict, will blaze forever unless it is put out this night on which it has been lit. The man who lit the fire and the coming kingdom by which it was lit will overcome us all!" But the king would hear none of it. He had twenty-seven chariots prepared, and he, his guests, and his court rode to subdue Patrick.

When the chariots arrived, Patrick was summoned before the king. The king ordered Patrick's bonfire extinguished, but no matter what his soldiers did, the fire refused to be put out. Patrick gave a bold testimony for Jesus before them and refused to be silent. When Laeghaire commanded his soldiers to execute Patrick to quiet him, confusion descended on them, and they attacked one another. When the two Druid priests then turned their vehemence on Patrick and Jesus' name, one fell and cracked his head on a rock, while the other somehow fell into the fire and perished. One version even records that when the king himself pulled his sword to slay Patrick, his arm froze in the air as stiff as a statue and stayed that way until he knelt in surrender to Patrick. Though it is unclear how many of the details of this encounter are legend and how many actually happened, Patrick's victory over Laeghaire and his Druids opened the political doors of Ireland to the gospel.

Patrick thus had a captive and royal audience to be among the first to be converted during his ministry. Though the king did not become a Christian on this day, his chief bard, his two daughters, and one of his brothers did. Less than two weeks later they were baptized. The brother gave Patrick land and a barn that became the first church, and also wealth to use to

spread Christianity throughout Ireland. In addition, Laeghaire gave Patrick the legal sanction [right] to preach throughout the island.

For the next thirty years Patrick established Christianity throughout Ireland, and though he had other miracles attributed to his ministry, he was not often far from trouble. Ireland was not neatly organized in kingdoms under Laeghaire, so whenever he went into a new area, it was likely that Laeghaire's sanction would mean very little. Patrick and his followers were imprisoned on several occasions — Patrick once spent two months in prison wondering if his ministry was over — and he saw many of his converts die, as well as being sentenced to death himself more than once. Through it all, though, Patrick remained humble and counted only on God's protection to free him from any situation. He wrote the following in a chant or prayer, which he titled "The Breastplate," that he taught others to remind them of their purpose and Protector:

Christ shield me today
Against poison,
Against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me abundance of
reward,
Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in quiet,
Christ in danger,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

Having successfully planted churches and established pastors and priests in every district in Ireland, Patrick died around the age of seventy-two on March 17, A.D. 461.

ST. PATRICK STORY, CONTINUED

Note: Introduce this next section as Patrick's confession, written shortly before he died.

I, Patrick, a sinner, am the most ignorant and of least account among the faithful, despised by many. ...

It was not any grace in me, but God who is victorious in me and resisted them all, so that I came to the Irish people to preach the gospel and to bear insults from unbelievers, to hear the scandal of my travels, and to endure many persecutions even to the extent of prison; so that I might surrender my liberty as a man of free condition for the profit of others, and if I should be found worthy, I am ready to give even my life for his name's sake unflinching, gladly, and without hesitation; and there (in Ireland) I desire to spend it until I die, if our Lord should grant it to me. I owe it to God's grace that so many people should through me be born again in God. ...

But I implore those who believe in and fear God, whoever consents to examine or receive this document composed by the obviously unlearned sinner Patrick in Ireland, that no one shall ever credit to me even the smallest of things that I achieved or may have told of that was pleasing to God, but accept and truly believe that it was the gift of God. And this is my confession before I die.

Patrick
Confession

But by God's grace I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Paul
(1 Corinthians 15:10)

ST. PATRICK – THE SLAVE OF IRELAND AND THE GOSPEL

Let's Talk About It

1. God created all the peoples of the world and desires that all come to know him. John 3:16 tells of his great love and how people can spend eternity with him. But how can people find out about God unless someone goes and tells them? God prepared Patrick to reach the people of Ireland in a unique way. Tell of three ways.

First, Patrick was kidnapped at the young age of 16 by an Irish raiding party. He was a slave for six years tending the herds of a Druidic high priest. During this time he learned the language, accent, and culture of Ireland. He sought God during this lonely time and found him. God had a plan for the Irish people and wanted to use Patrick to reach them!

2. Throughout the life of Patrick you can see God's hand of protection on him. Write some of the ways you read of God's power over evil in Patrick's story.

The bonfire could not be put out so Patrick could give a bold testimony for Jesus.

Some Druids and soldiers "accidentally" died trying to kill Patrick so he couldn't speak of Jesus anymore. God changed the heart of the king who once tried to kill Patrick and allowed Patrick to preach throughout Ireland. Patrick was often imprisoned and near death, but God spared his life so the Word of truth could be told among the Irish people.

3. How is God's love for the people of Ireland shown through the life of Patrick?

Patrick demonstrated God's love to the very people who kidnapped him by returning to Ireland so he could tell them of Jesus. Patrick wanted to see his old master, who enslaved him for six years, come to know the Lord. He risked his life traveling the countryside of Ireland so the people could hear the truth of Jesus and stop worshiping idols. It was God's love that compelled Patrick to return to Ireland and do everything possible to bring the good news of salvation to the people. He was willing to give his life for the Irish so they could know God's love.

4. God truly loves all the people of the world ... and he wants to use you to help reach them with his good news! Patrick was part of God's plan to reach the Irish. Ask God how he wants to use you.