

GOD PROVIDES

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADER'S GUIDE

Theme: Seek First the Kingdom of God

Objective: To recognize and understand that during times of hardship, we can find peace by seeking first God's Kingdom and trusting that God provides.

Overview:

- Opening Prayer for Missions
- Icebreaker - Have You Ever...?
- Activity #1 – Read Matthew 6:25-34
- Activity #2 – Bible Scavenger Hunt
- Activity #3 – Read and discuss the Saint in Focus
- Closing Prayer & Assemble OCMC Coin Boxes.

Materials: Prayer for Missions, Bible Scavenger Hunt, Bibles (or access to online version), writing utensils, and OCMC Coin Boxes

Note to Teachers:

The Orthodox Christian Mission Center sends missionaries to bring the Good News of Christ to the ends of the earth. Missionaries are ordinary people who have followed Christ's commandment to "seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness." Amidst the challenges and turmoil our world faces, missionaries are called by God to go and bring healing of both soul and body to those in need. He has prepared them for their ministry and will provide the tools needed to care for the whole person. Together with the local leaderships within the communities that they serve, they share the peace that is found in God's kingdom. Let us look to those who participate in the mission of the Church as we transcend the troubles of our times. They are examples for how we too can spread the peace of God's kingdom to those around us.

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Opening Prayer:

Prayer for Missions

God of Truth: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, hear our prayer for those who do not know You, that they may come to a saving knowledge of the truth and that Your Name may be praised among all peoples of the world. Sustain, inspire, and enlighten your servants who bring the Gospel. Bring fresh vigor to wavering faith; sustain our faith when it is still fragile. Continually renew missionary zeal in ourselves and in the Church, and raise up new missionaries who will follow You to the ends of the world. Make us witnesses to Your goodness, full of love, strength, and faith, for Your glory and for the salvation of the entire world. For you are a merciful and loving God, and to You we give glory, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Icebreaker:

Have You Ever...?

Have your students stand on one side of the room in a straight line, side by side. Tell the students not to talk during this activity. You will read several questions, and if it applies to a student, have them walk to the other side of the room facing the rest of the group. Give everyone a moment to think about the question or why they crossed to the other side. After some time, have everyone return and wait for the next question.

See separate sheet for the questions. Alter as best seen fit to benefit your students.

Remember: Let the students know all that is shared stays within the group. As brothers and sisters in Christ, it is important that we respect and love each person here. There may be times when they feel vulnerable or uncomfortable. Encourage them to explore it to learn or gain insight about themselves. Allow this to lead into today's discussion.

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Activity #1: Read Matthew 6:25-34

Explain to your students that the reading for this lesson is from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, found in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus teaches His disciples and followers about how to live a life dedicated to God. Our focus of this lesson is found in Matthew 6:33, seeking first the Kingdom of God in times of hardship. If possible, separate the scripture reading into sections and have your students take turns reading out loud. Help facilitate discussion following the reading. If the full passage is too lengthy for your students, the following excerpt can be used instead:

31 Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" 32 For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Questions:

- *Have you ever experienced not knowing what you would eat, drink, or wear? If not, how do you imagine it would feel?*
- *What did Jesus say about worry and struggle?*
- *What does it mean when Christ says that "your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things"?*
- *When trouble arises, where do you turn to first? Where should you turn?*
- *How can we "seek first the kingdom of God"?*

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Discussion: (Reflect on this rather than read to your students)

Explore with your students how life is like a road trip or journey. On this journey, we strive to reach our destination: God. Along the way, we encounter “speed bumps” that slow us down or keep us from reaching our goal. They can be things we need like food, water, or shelter. Other times, we face struggles or conflicts like being bullied, struggling with body image, or losing a loved one. We begin to worry about them and sometimes become fearful of what will happen tomorrow. Maybe we try relying on ourselves, not God.

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reminds us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you” (Matthew 6:33). He reminds us that our Heavenly Father does not want us to worry. God knows what we need even before we ask for it. He gives us food to eat and water to drink. He gives us our family, friends, teachers, and loved ones to help us during troubling times. The Church teaches us that God loves everyone. By praying and offering our worries to Him, we demonstrate our trust in Him. With this trust, we find peace, knowing that God is with us as we seek Him and His Kingdom.

As we direct our lives towards God, He calls us to share His peace with those struggling around us. He calls missionaries to serve as loving witnesses and stewards of our Faith to a world seeking His Kingdom. They are ordinary people who trust that God has prepared them for their ministries. Some are clergy and seminarians, doctors, educators, and even craftsmen, each with the purpose of uniting people to Christ. Today, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center supports over 25 OCMC missionaries serving in the field. They are in places like Albania, Romania, South Korea, Guatemala, and more. Ask the students to keep the missionaries in their prayers this coming Lenten season.

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Activity #2: OCMC Bible Scavenger Hunt

Have your students look up Bible verses to find the missing words. You can have them play as teams or work individually. You can also add a timing aspect, but remember to have fun! Pass out copies of the Scavenger Hunt sheet and begin. Review with the class after some time has passed. Discuss the different ways that God is with us and helping us grow. **NOTE:** That the verses listed for this activity are from the NRSV translation. Adjust activity based on the translations found in your Bibles.

- What common themes do you see in these verses? How might these verses be helpful in times of trouble?
- In what ways does God provide for you?

Activity 3: Saint in Focus

Read the life of St. Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland

Read aloud or have the students to take turns reading portions of the life of St. Patrick of Ireland. Reflect on how his life is an example that we can follow.

Discussion

- What difficulties did St. Patrick encounter as he tried to follow Christ?
- How did he handle his struggles?
- What lessons are there for us to learn from the life of St. Patrick when living in times of trouble?
- How does Matthew 6:25-34 help us to view this story?

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Closing:

Discuss how God is working in their lives and encourage them to participate in the ministry of missions. Have them assemble and take home OCMC Coin Boxes to fill and return at a time you decide upon. Share that these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center. Thus, they are supporting those who are working to bring God's provision to the whole world. Remind the students of their role in spreading the peace found in Christ and His kingdom.

Closing Prayer:

The prayer below is adapted from *Saint Patrick's Breastplate Prayer*. It is a wonderful way to start the day. It allows us to align ourselves towards Christ, trusting in Him to help guide us through the day.

I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me, God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to secure me:

Against snares of devils, against temptations of vices, against inclinations of nature, against everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near, alone and in a crowd.

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 in breadth, Christ in length, Christ in height, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of the Lord. Salvation is of Christ. May Your Salvation, O Lord, be ever with us.

SAINT IN FOCUS

THE LIFE OF ST. PATRICK, ENLIGHTENER OF IRELAND

Feast day: March 17

Patrick was born and lived in the village of Bannavem Taberniae, in a part of Britain now known as Wales, around the year 385, as records during this time were not well-kept. This was the time when Christian missionaries were sent to many parts of Europe, and the Church was slowly working in the isolated islands of the British Isles. His parents were among the few Christians in Britain, where pagan gods were widely worshipped. Patrick's father, Calpornis, was a deacon and a Roman county decurion (tax official), and his grandfather, Portitus, was a priest.

Young Patrick was not particularly religious or scholarly but lived a quiet life. At the age of sixteen he was kidnapped by pirates from Ireland, who had been raiding the northern coast of Britain. He was taken to Ireland, sold as a slave, and spent six years working as a shepherd on a lonely mountain in Slemish, County Antrim. During this time Patrick not only learned the language of his captors but used his solitude to find God and the faith of his youth, discovering that he was indeed not alone.

During his captivity, Patrick had two visions. In his first, he was told he would soon be returning home. His second vision told to him that his ship was waiting to take him home. Patrick walked two hundred miles, until he came to the coast and a ship preparing to set sail. At first, he was refused entry, but as he turned away the captain, miraculously changing his mind, suddenly called to him that he was allowed to board. The trip took several weeks, and at one point there was no food. The captain, knowing Patrick was a Christian, heckled the young man to pray to his God.

Patrick did pray until, miraculously, a herd of pigs appeared and saved them from starvation. The ship then made way for Gaul (present day France). Patrick wandered until he came upon the island of Lerins. There he studied for several years in a monastery, taught by monks including St. Vincent and St. Honoratus. Eventually returning home to his family, Patrick settled down to live quietly. This was not to last for long, for Patrick's second and final trip to Ireland was about to begin.

SAINT IN FOCUS

THE LIFE OF ST. PATRICK, ENLIGHTENER OF IRELAND

Soon Patrick had another vision in which an angel came to him bearing several letters. He opened one inscribed, “The Voice of the Irish,” and heard the people who were once his captors calling him back to them.

Seeking further instruction, Patrick returned to Gaul, where he studied under St. Germanus of Auxerre. During his fourteen years there, he was ordained a priest and eventually consecrated a bishop. Bishop Patrick knew his mission was to return to Ireland and help to fully establish the Church in the pagan countryside.

Bishop Patrick knew he would be following other missionaries who had gone before him, including St. Palladius, who had spent a year in the harsh land, attempting to plant the seeds of Christianity, arguing with pagans, and correcting false versions of Christian doctrines which were spreading across the land. Patrick was one of several missionaries who arrived around 432.

The young bishop faced many disappointments and dangers as he endured hostility from people loyal to their pagan gods, especially a group known as Druids, pagan medicine men, who were suspicious of foreigners. Patrick worked through all these obstacles, winning the approval of several kings and leaders, including the High-King Loigaire at Tara. He was able to convince people that the pagan leaders were not showing them the One True God. He confronted pagan priests with the truth, and one time he toppled a pagan god’s statue.

Never accepting gifts from kings or the wealthy, St. Patrick loved to talk to the common people, spending time with them and serving their spiritual and physical needs. Leprosy was an especially horrible disease of the skin and organs, leaving people terribly scarred and full of sores. Its victims were outcasts, compelled to live apart from others. The bishop embraced these suffering lepers, and invited them to live near him, to better minister to their needs. Often, he would go alone to Mt. Miss to meditate, pray, and fast for days at a time.

SAINT IN FOCUS

THE LIFE OF ST. PATRICK, ENLIGHTENER OF IRELAND

Bishop Patrick had to explain God and Christ's Holy Church in ways his people would understand. He used the three-leafed plant known as the shamrock, which grew in the emerald green fields of Ireland, to illustrate the Holy Trinity to skeptical listeners. The three leaves, growing from a single stem, helped the Irish people understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Bishop Patrick tirelessly prayed and continued his work, establishing churches and monasteries, including his episcopal see in Armagh in 444. His writings include several letters and confessions. He worked with countless young people, and bravely denounced a leader who had enslaved some members of the Christian community. He is perhaps best known for defeating the pagan leaders, ordaining priests and bishops to serve his people, and baptizing thousands. St. Patrick died on March 17, around the year 461.

The humble bishop who is so widely celebrated with legends, parades, and merriment on his feast day considered himself a sinner and humble servant of Christ. His shamrock serves as a symbol of his loving desire to bring the people of Ireland to the One True God and His Holy Church.

Troparion (Tone 3): St. Patrick

*Holy Bishop Patrick, faithful shepherd of the Christs royal flock,
you filled Ireland with the radiance of the Gospel
and the mighty strength of the Trinity!
now that you stand before the Savior,
pray that He may preserve us in faith and love!*

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ICEBREAKER

QUESTIONS - HAVE YOU EVER...?

Have You Ever...?

1. Stayed awake for an entire night?
2. Had a pet?
3. Won a contest or received a prize?
4. Sang a song in the shower?
5. Played a sport?
6. Received a good grade on a homework assignment?
7. Gone camping or to a church camp?
8. Felt nervous about an upcoming performance?
9. Felt guilty for telling a lie?
10. Felt lonely?
11. Struggled with body image?
12. Been bullied?
13. Lost a grandparent or close family member?
14. Questioned your faith?
15. Turned to God in times of good and bad?

BIBLE SCAVENGER HUNT

FIND THE BIBLICAL PASSAGES AND INSERT
THE MISSING WORDS

1. We know that all things work _____ for good for those who ____ God, who are called according to his _____. **(Romans 8:28)**
2. I hereby command you: Be strong and _____; do not be _____ or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you _____ you go.' **(Joshua 1:9)**
3. Do not _____, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will _____ you, I will _____ you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. **(Isaiah 41:10)**
4. _____ in the Lord with all your _____, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways _____ him, and he will make straight your paths. **(Proverbs 3:5-6)**
5. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the _____ of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; _____ in him, and he will _____. He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. **(Psalm 37: 4-6)**
6. But recall those earlier days when, after you were _____, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, For you need _____, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was _____. **(Hebrews 10:32, 36)**
7. Do not worry about _____, but in everything by prayer and supplication with _____ let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in _____. **(Philippians 4:6-7)**
8. But he said to me, "My _____ is sufficient for you, for my _____ is made perfect in _____." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am _____. **(2 Corinthians 12: 9-10)**
9. _____ I leave with you, My peace I _____ to you; I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be _____, and do let them be afraid. **(John 14:27)**

BIBLE SCAVENGER HUNT

ANSWER KEY

KEY:

1. Together, Love, Purpose
2. Courageous, Frightened, Wherever
3. Fear, Strength, Help
4. Trust, Heart, Acknowledge
5. Desires, Trust, Act
6. Enlightened, Endurance, Promised
7. Anything, Thanksgiving, Christ Jesus
8. Grace, Power, Weakness, Strong
9. Peace, Give, Troubled