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The goal of Cornerstone Connections is to lead you to the Bible to see the big story of God and people. This big story continues from the first generation in Eden to your generation today. It’s about the lives of people as the God of the universe interacts with them.

If you are looking for a word from God that is real, Cornerstone Connections captures the message of Scripture and challenges you to make the connections to your real life.

God’s Word is not only real; it is rock-solid. For the first generation to hear God’s voice in the garden as well as the last group standing before Christ at the Second Coming, the Word of God has been and continues to be reliable.

The word from God comes to us in the stories of people who encountered Him and made a decision to either follow Him or walk away. Real. Solid. Stories. You will find one in Into the Story in each lesson. Out of the Story will provide you with ways to search for truth you can apply to your life. In each lesson you will also find:

• **What Do You Think?** — a mental activity to get your mind and heart in gear for the story to follow. Every time you approach a Bible story, you are coming to it in the context of the story in which you live every day.

• **Did You Know?** — a brief statistic or definition that digs a little deeper into the story or simply provides some helpful facts to bring to the lesson.

• **Key Text** — a verse that points out a key concept from the story. It is also a great place to find verses that you can memorize and store away for later use.

• **Punch Lines** — a few other verses from Scripture that punctuate key concepts of the lesson. You may see connections between them and the Bible story as well as your own life.

• **Flashlight** — a brief snapshot of Ellen White’s input on the story. These glimmers that shed light onto the biblical passage will also give you a glimpse of what awaits you in the suggested weekly reading from her inspired commentary on the stories—the Conflict of the Ages.*

• **Other Eyes** — a couple of quotes from various contemporary or historic sources that may open up a slightly different perspective on the central message of the lesson.

• **Making It Real** — the guide to making the truths about God in this story your very own. Begin here if you are studying this lesson on your own prior to, or after, studying it in a Sabbath School class. Each day of the week you will be directed to explore one of the sections of the lesson, to relate it to the story you live, and to make the message from God apply to you personally.

Welcome to Cornerstone Connections.

—The Editors

PS. Don’t forget to check out the reading plan.

*A special modern adaptation has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.*
January

3 — The Living Message [p. 5]
God has revealed Himself to His people through prophets, the Temple system, and through the written Word. But only Jesus can capture what God is really like.

10 — Countdown to the Savior [p. 9]
Although the Jews desired the Messiah’s coming, they misunderstood His mission and purpose. Thus, they missed Him—just like we can.

17 — Servant of the Lord [p. 13]
An angel presents Mary with the shocking news that she will bear the Son of God. God can do great things for and through us, too, but He requires our obedience.

It has been said that a person finds what they’re looking for. Simeon and Anna looked with anticipation for the coming of the Messiah. They were not disappointed.

31 — Following Yonder Star [p. 21]
When the Magi went in search of the Messiah whom they had been studying about, God’s natural Global Positioning System placed them exactly where they needed to be.

February

7 — Growing Up [p. 25]
Jesus faced many of the challenges and trials of youth that you face today, but He remained sinless. How did He do it? Can you imagine Jesus as someone whom you might want to know and hang out with?

14 — One of a Kind [p. 29]
Just as God created John the Baptist for a holy purpose, He created each of us for a holy purpose. Standing for God will cost us much, as it did John. Is it worth it?

21 — Hard Target [p. 33]
After Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, He met each of Satan’s temptations with a clear “It is written.” God’s Word holds the same power for us as we meet our day-to-day temptations and struggles.

28 — Come See [p. 37]
The dramatic incident of Philip introducing Nathanael to Jesus captures the coordination between the human and the divine as Christ makes disciples for His kingdom.

March

7 — Partying With Jesus [p. 41]
Jesus worked His first miracle at a wedding feast in Cana, turning the water into wine and blessing the joyful celebration with His power. Jesus’ power continues today to transform ordinary things into extraordinary!

14 — Get Out of My House! [p. 45]
Instead of having reverence for the house of the Lord, the money changers were using the Temple for their own gain, turning it into a place of greed and materialism.

21 — A Slow Burn [p. 49]
Often people feel as if they’re not converted because they haven’t had a “Damascus Road” experience. But the story of Nicodemus reminds us that conversion can be a lifelong journey.

28 — It’s Your Turn [p. 53]
John the Baptist could have become jealous when his disciples began following Jesus. But he chose to take joy in Jesus’ success. He realized his role was to prepare the way.
“By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God—God’s thought made audible. . . . But not alone for His earthborn children was this revelation given. Our little world is the lesson book of the universe. God’s wonderful purpose of grace, the mystery of redeeming love, is the theme into which ‘angels desire to look,’ and it will be their study throughout endless ages. Both the redeemed and the unfallen beings will find in the cross of Christ their science and their song” (The Desire of Ages, pp. 19, 20).
What's your favorite way to get a message to someone?

___ Phone
___ E-mail or Facebook message
___ MSN/chat
___ Text message on my phone
___ Handwritten note
___ Face to face
___ Through another person

In the Phillips translation of the New Testament, the first verse of John 1 (today's Key Text) is translated as “At the beginning God expressed himself.” That translation does a good job of capturing Jesus’ special relationship to God and the reason He came to this planet. The Greek word for “Word” in John 1:1-3 is logos, which means “God’s speech, God’s message, what God has to say.” In other words, what God has to say to this planet was—Jesus. If we read the beginning of John 1 as the behind-the-scenes introduction to the whole story of Jesus, then we learn that Jesus was sent here for one specific purpose: to tell us what God is like. People have a lot of false and mistaken ideas about God, but we can point to the stories of Jesus in the Gospels and say, “This is what God is like! And this is what God has to say to us!”

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . .

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

(John 1:1-18, NIV)
If Jesus came to show the world what God is like, what can we say about the character of God based on the kind of person Jesus was? Try to come up with five or six words that describe God as revealed by Jesus.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think sending Jesus was God’s best way of communicating with us? What other ways had He already tried? What other ways could He have tried?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What does it mean to say that Jesus “gives light to every man”? What about people who have never heard of Jesus, or rejected Him? Does He bring light to them too?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think “the world did not recognize Him”? If you had lived at Jesus’ time, do you think you would have recognized Him as the Son of God? What stops people from recognizing Him today?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What does it mean to be “born of God”?  

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

“He [Christ] is the self-expression of the Father—what the Father has to say. And there never was a time when He was not saying it.” —C. S. Lewis, 20th-century English scholar.

“Christ is the most perfect image of God, into which we are so renewed as to bear the image of God, in knowledge, purity, righteousness, and true holiness.” —John Calvin, 16th-century Swiss reformer.
Sabbath

The Into the Story passage from John 1 describes how Jesus came to be God’s message to this world. John uses metaphors to describe Jesus (remember those from your English class?): Jesus is the Light. Jesus is the Life. Jesus is the Word.

What does each of those images tell us about Jesus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Light</th>
<th>Life</th>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
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What other things can you think of that Jesus is compared to in the Bible? What do you think they tell us about Jesus? What else could you compare Jesus to? What does that comparison mean to you?

Sunday

Look back at the What Do You Think? portion of the lesson. What’s your favorite way to send messages to people?

Sometimes how you send a message depends on what it contains. MSN may be great for chatting idly with friends, but if you want to say something that requires a lot of thought, you may want to compose an e-mail or a handwritten letter. Some people would rather break up over the phone because it’s easier to hang up and walk away. Some of us find it easier to express deeply personal emotions in the written word, while others always prefer to speak face-to-face.

For God’s ultimate message of love to His earthly creation, only one kind of “Logos” would do. God had already communicated for hundreds of years, speaking through prophets, Bible writers, and the Temple worship service. But no secondhand method would do for telling humanity that God loved them enough to die for them. Only God Himself in human form could do that.

Monday

What does the life of Jesus tell us about who God is and how God thinks and feels about us?

Think of three stories from Jesus’ life that you know and like. Write a very brief summary of each in the boxes below (see example). Then, for each one write what you think that tells us about God.

Jesus feeds 5,000 people.

- God can do a lot with a little.
- God is concerned.

Tuesday

A ccording to the Flashlight passage from The Desire of Ages, Jesus came to earth not just to demonstrate God’s love to people on this planet, but to those watching on other, unfallen worlds. Imagine you are a sinless alien watching the drama unfold as God the Son comes to earth as a human being. What do you think your reactions might be? What conclusions would you draw about God?

Wednesday

R ead the verses in the Punch Lines section of the lesson. What can you learn from each of these verses about Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth?

Isaiah 9:6
Matthew 1:21
Luke 2:10, 11

Thursday

J esus came to show people what God is like. But when Jesus returned to heaven, His work here wasn’t finished. He left His people—His church—behind to continue showing the world what God was like.

As Christians, we don’t always do the greatest job of that. But it’s sobering to reflect that “your life may be the only Bible some people will ever read.” What’s one practical thing you can do today that will help someone else see what the God you worship is like?

Friday

A s you think about Jesus’ coming to earth and what that reveals to us about God, what is your response? Write a short letter-prayer reflecting your feelings. Use the sentence starters below if they help.

Dear God,

When I think about Jesus coming to earth to show us what You are like, it makes me feel _________________________________.
I want to tell You that ________________________________.
Because of Jesus, I think You are ________________________________.

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

this week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages, chapter 1.

*Special adaptation of The Desire of Ages has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
**countdown to the Savior**

**flashlight**

“For more than a thousand years the Jewish people had awaited the Saviour’s coming. . . . In song and prophecy, in temple rite and household prayer, they had enshrined His name. And yet at His coming they knew Him not. . . .

“Yet God had chosen Israel. He had called them to preserve among men the knowledge of His law, and of the symbols and prophecies that pointed to the Saviour. . . . They were to reveal God to men” *(The Desire of Ages, p. 27).*

**Commentary:** *The Desire of Ages*, chapters 2, 3.

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“So in heaven’s council the hour for the coming of Christ had been determined. When the great clock of time pointed to that hour, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.” *(The Desire of Ages, p. 32)*
Do you agree or disagree with these statements?
The Jewish nation and the SDA Church are **similar**.
The Jewish nation and the SDA Church are **different**.

Mark on the continuum where your response to these statements would fall. Be prepared to explain your answer.

The Bible contains many prophecies pertaining to the coming Messiah, and specifically to both His first and second advents. The first prophecy is found in Genesis 3:15, speaking not only about Satan’s war against God’s church, but also the eventual crushing of Satan after the lesser harm (albeit human death) he inflicts on Christ.

Adam and Eve believed their firstborn son would be the Messiah.

Every part of the Temple ritual was a foreshadowing of Christ. Its cruciform layout is common in great cathedrals today.

The last chapter of the Bible ends with the prophecy and promise of the return of Jesus.

“**They did not become the light of the world, but shut themselves away from the world in order to escape temptation to idolatry.** In the instruction given through Moses, God had placed restrictions upon their association with idolaters; but this teaching had been misinterpreted. It was intended to prevent them from conforming to the practices of the heathen. But it was used to build up a wall of separation between Israel and all other nations” (**The Desire of Ages**, p. 29).

“**As they departed from God, the Jews . . . lost sight of the teaching of the ritual service.** That service had been instituted by Christ Himself. In every part it was a symbol of Him; and it had been full of vitality and spiritual beauty. But the Jews lost the spiritual life from their ceremonies, and clung to the dead forms. They trusted to the sacrifices and ordinances themselves, instead of resting upon Him to whom they pointed” (**The Desire of Ages**, p. 29).

“The Saviour’s coming was foretold in Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard the promise, they looked for its speedy fulfillment. They joyfully welcomed their firstborn son, hoping that he might be the Deliverer. But the fulfillment of the promise tarried. Those who first received it died without the sight. From the days of Enoch the promise was repeated through patriarchs and prophets, keeping alive the hope of His appearing, and yet He came not. The prophecy of Daniel revealed the time of His advent, but not all rightly interpreted the message. Century after century passed away; the voices of the prophets ceased. The hand of the oppressor was heavy upon Israel, and many were ready to exclaim, ‘The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth.’ Eze. 12:22. But like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God’s purposes know no haste and no delay” (**The Desire of Ages**, pp. 31, 32).

“With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. . . . Through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race” (**The Desire of Ages**, p. 37).
Are Seventh-day Adventists you know “in the world but not of the world”? Do you have any good friends who are not Seventh-day Adventists? Why or why not?

Describe how the various components of the Temple ritual service were symbols of Christ. What symbols of Christ are included in Seventh-day Adventist worship services?

Why were the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds intensely interested in what was happening on earth? Do you think those beings are as interested in today’s world?

Can you reconcile the statement that “through every age, through every hour, the love of God had been exercised toward the fallen race,” yet calamities such as the holocaust and the Christmas 2004 tsunami occur? Explain.

“Look upon Jesus, Child of God, come for to save us, Child of God. In His time He came at first prophecy’s end; in our time we pray may He come again. In the world, not of it, the Savior our Guide, we, His blessed children, each must decide: Do we serve God or Mammon as we live out our days? For what shall it profit if we’re not His always.”—Rick Blondo
Sabbath

And yet at His coming they knew Him not" (The Desire of Ages, p. 27). Do you believe the adage “What is past is prologue”? Will there be a group of people in the last days who, like the ancient Jewish nation, are students of the Scriptures yet fail to recognize that the hour of His coming is at hand? How can we prevent our being part of that group? What can we do to be alert to the signs of His coming?

Sunday

Adventists are called to be a separate people, meaning that we do not conform to the degenerate ways of this world, yet are still part of this world. Within Adventism one can find the entire range of degrees of separation as evidenced by how one lives, where one lives, how one dresses, where one goes to school, what one drives, what one eats, ad infinitum. Where are you on this spectrum, and why? How do you feel about or react to those who are elsewhere on that spectrum?

Messiah did not come as quickly as the patriarchs thought He would. Over time, many people lost hope. Others lost the vision entirely. Ellen White states: “God’s purposes know no haste and no delay.” What are your personal thoughts on the second coming of Christ? Do you believe it could happen next month? next year? in your lifetime? Are you hoping to achieve some life milestones prior to the Second Coming, such as learning to drive, graduating from college, getting married and experiencing a sexual relationship, etc.? Does this “not to worry” text often shared with teenagers give you comfort: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, NIV)? If so, how?

Monday

Who comprises the heavenly council? If things on earth are transpiring according to a metaphorical “great clock of time,” is there merit to the idea of predestination? Is it possible we humans can hasten or delay the second coming of Christ?

Tuesday

How do Seventh-day Adventists reveal God to men and women? Here’s another way to think about that: When your classmates, friends, neighbors, coworkers, teachers, police officers, boyfriend, girlfriend, parents, pets (OK, that last one is a bit much, but you get the idea) see you, what is it about God they also see?

Wednesday

You’re not out here all alone. Someone is looking after you or for you as a shepherd does his sheep. Does that thought bring you comfort or annoy you? That may depend on where you’re at in relation to the rest of the flock. And the someone could be a Someone or others such as a grandparent, parent, pastor, teacher, friend. Maybe you’re sometimes the someone looking after or for another person. With the “finding” of a lost sheep, coin, or person comes rejoicing on earth as it does in heaven. Have you had a “rejoicing” experience—either from your “being found” or from “finding” someone else?

Thursday

Should time last long enough for you to establish a home of your own, do you think you’ll want to live in an area with a high concentration of Seventh-day Adventists? Why or why not? Would you want to enter mission service in a country or environment far different from your own? Why or why not?

Friday

If you harbor the notion that the second coming of Jesus will happen at some far-off time, have you ever thought about how short life can be? God forbid it, but if your life were to end tomorrow (in my house we refer to this line of reasoning as “If I were to get hit by a cement truck tomorrow”), then the next thing you’ll know is the second coming of Christ. Are you at peace knowing with assurance that you are saved right now through Christ’s sacrifice of Himself on the cross? If not, or uncertain, please talk with your Sabbath School teacher, parent, or pastor. It isn’t presumptuous to have that assurance of salvation. It is a promise fulfilled.

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Insight

At www.InsightMagazine.org you can join the Web forum and help shape the future. Discuss the Sabbath School lessons in a virtual community.

Insight has stories of people today from which you can learn practical ideas for reality living.

this week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages, chapters 2, 3.

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servant of the Lord

“Angels attend Joseph and Mary as they journey from their home in Nazareth to the city of David. . . . But in the city of their royal line, Joseph and Mary are unrecognized and unhonored. Weary and homeless, they traverse the entire length of the narrow street, from the gate of the city to the eastern extremity of the town, vainly seeking a resting place for the night. There is no room for them at the crowded inn. In a rude building where the beasts are sheltered, they at last find refuge, and here the Redeemer of the world is born” (The Desire of Ages, p. 44).

Commentary: The Desire of Ages, chapter 4.
If I were Mary and the angel came to me announcing I was going to give birth to God’s Son, my reaction would be:

- “Thank You, Lord!”
- “Are you crazy?”
- “Am I crazy?”
- “That is completely impossible.”
- “Wow. I must be pretty amazing!”

any religious traditions at the time of Jesus (and later) had stories about miraculous births. In these stories, a god usually came to a woman and mated with her, often in the form of an animal. In Greek myths, for example, the god Zeus turned himself into a swan to mate with a woman named Leda; the child born of this union was the beautiful Helen of Troy. The women in these stories seemed to have little choice in what happened to them.

By contrast, the story of Jesus’ birth contains no bizarre godlike animals, and Jesus’ mother is not forced against her will. Instead, an angel simply comes to Mary with news of the miraculous birth. Mary becomes a partner in bringing salvation to the world when she chooses to accept the angel’s news, saying, “I am the Lord’s servant.”

“IN THE STORY

“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’

“Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.’

‘How will this be,’ Mary asked the angel, ‘since I am a virgin?’

“The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’ Then the angel left her.

“And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.’

“So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

(Luke 1:26-49; 2:4-7)
OUT OF THE STORY

What thoughts might have gone through Mary’s mind when she first heard the angel’s announcement?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

What does Mary’s song in Luke 1:46-55 tell us about Mary and the kind of person she was?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

When Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stall where animals were kept, how do you think she felt about the angel’s prophecy? Do you think she was still glad God had chosen her?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think God chose to come to earth as the child of a family so poor they didn’t even have a place to stay? What does this tell us about God?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

punch lines

“This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

“But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit’” (Matthew 1:18-20, NIV).

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14, NIV).

“He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2, NIV).

other eyes

“Mary is the lily in God’s garden.”—Bridget of Sweden, 14th-century Swedish nun.

“If I had been the Virgin Mary, I would have said ‘No.’”—Margaret Smith, current American comedian.

“[Mary is the] highest woman and the noblest gem in Christianity after Christ. . . . She is nobility, wisdom, and holiness personified. We can never honor her enough. Still honor and praise must be given to her in such a way as to injure neither Christ nor the Scriptures.”—Martin Luther, 16th-century German reformer.
Sabbath
The angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary is traditionally known as the “Annunciation” (making an announcement). Go online, type “annunciation” into a search engine such as Google Images, and look at famous paintings from history in which different artists have tried to portray what that moment might have been like.

As you look at these pictures, how is Mary portrayed? _______________________
______________________________

How is the angel shown? ________________

Is there one picture that looks most like you imagine the scene? If you were to draw your own “Annunciation,” what would you include? How would you show Mary and the angel? Either draw your picture or write a brief description of how you’d imagine the scene.

Monday
Read Mary’s response to the angel in the Key Text for this week. Then read Margaret Smith’s quote in the Other Eyes section.

What do you think you would have said to the angel? _______________________
______________________________

Was saying “No” ever a real option for Mary? _______________________
______________________________

Why do you think she might have considered saying “No”? _______________________
______________________________

Tuesday
The Flashlight section of the lesson describes Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem—poor, alone, unwanted, and with no place to go. What kinds of people in today’s society might be able to relate to Mary and Joseph as they arrived in Bethlehem?

______________________________
______________________________
______________________________

For people living through these kinds of experiences, it’s meaningful to know that Jesus was born into a family who were very much like refugees. God the Son did not choose to come to the world as a prince in a royal family (unlike most of the other “miraculous births” we looked at in Sunday’s lesson). He is able to sympathize with people like His earthly parents—people who are desperate and have no place to go.

Wednesday
The passage from Matthew 1 in the Punch Lines section of the lesson tells the story of Mary’s miraculous pregnancy from Joseph’s point of view. As you read it, put yourself in Joseph’s place. Joseph had the right to publicly shame Mary and have her punished for what must have seemed to him like unfaithfulness. Even before he was visited by the angel, what does Joseph’s immediate reaction tell us about the kind of person he was?

What kind of qualities might be needed in the man who would be Jesus’ earthly father?

Thursday
Mary took on a vital role in the story of salvation because she said “Yes,” when God told her He had a special role for her. Although few of us will ever get miraculous visits from an angel, God has a special part in His plan for each one of us.

What is God asking you to say “Yes” to right now? What would it mean if you said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it be to me as you have said”?

Friday
How important is the story of Jesus’ birth to your faith as a Christian? If these stories (Matthew 1; 2 and Luke 1; 2) weren’t in the Bible, what difference would it make to your beliefs about God and Jesus? What do we learn about God through the stories of Jesus’ birth?

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

**A special adaptation of The Desire of Ages has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
As Simeon enters the temple, he sees a family presenting their firstborn son before the priest. Their appearance bespeaks poverty; but Simeon understands the warnings of the Spirit, and he is deeply impressed that the infant being presented to the Lord is the Consolation of Israel, the One he has longed to see (The Desire of Ages, p. 55).

Commentary: The Desire of Ages, chapter 5.

flashlight

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

(Luke 2:25, 26, NIV)
Voting—Agree or disagree (explain your response):
The awareness of people about Christ at the time of His birth is likely to be similar to what people expect at the Second Coming.

_______________________________________
_______________________________________
_______________________________________

In Palestine the place of Gentiles, slaves, and women was low. However, Luke’s Gospel features the outcasts, the downcast, and those who are often overlooked, such as women, children, and widows. In fact, there are 43 references to women in Luke’s Gospel. Furthermore, 25 percent of all widows referred to in the entire Bible are referred to by Luke.

“On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young pigeons.’

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.’

“The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’

“There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

“When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.”

(Luke 2:21-39, NIV)
punch lines

“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13, NASB).

“He says, ‘You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth’” (Isaiah 49:6, NLT).

“The Lord has demonstrated his holy power before the eyes of all the nations. All the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God” (Isaiah 52:10, NLT).

“But you have God-blessed eyes—eyes that see! And God-blessed ears—ears that hear! A lot of people, prophets and humble believers among them, would have given anything to see what you are seeing, to hear what you are hearing, but never had the chance” (Matthew 13:16, 17, Message).

“Lord, I wait for your salvation” (Genesis 49:18, NCV).

Read the story and try to imagine the scene in your mind’s eye. Envision the sights of the Temple, the sounds, smells, and the story as it might have played out.

Underline what you think are three key phrases in this passage.

With so little information about the childhood events of Jesus, why do you think this story is recorded in the Bible?

Examine the words spoken by Simeon to God, and his words to Mary. When you consider these prophetic statements, what can you discern about the kind of person Simeon was?

Consider also Anna’s response (although her exact words are not recorded). Think about whether Simeon and Anna were typical people with common expectations about the Messiah, or were they somewhat unique for their time? What do you think? Explain.

How do you think Anna’s lifestyle—always living at the Temple, fasting, and praying—affect her influence on others? The last phrase observes: “she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.” How do you think people responded to her words?

Since it was revealed to Simeon that he would not die before seeing the Messiah, imagine how eagerly he must have been looking at the end of his years, knowing any day he would witness God’s Son. How does this anticipation relate to those of us living in the present season of earth’s history?

“In our sad condition our only consolation is the expectancy of another life.”

—Martin Luther, 16th-century German Reformer.

“There were many that saw the babe but did not see the salvation.”—Unknown.

“We need a baptism of clear seeing. We desperately need seers who can see through the mist—Christian leaders with prophetic vision.”—A. W. Tozer, 20th-century American pastor, author, and editor.
Sabbath
Read and respond to the voting question in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. To what degree do you think “the remnant” at the first coming will be like “the remnant” that are alive when Christ returns? God declares in Jeremiah 29:13: “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (NASB). How common is it in your life to witness someone who lives by this passage? Why do you think seeking God “with all your heart” is such a challenge?

Sunday
As you read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to guide your study, you may notice the response that Simeon made to Christ as well as the response of Anna. Compare the two reactions and note how they are similar and how they are different. What do you think is the central lesson in this story for the church? What is the message you think God is trying to say to you in this week’s lesson?

Tuesday
Read the quote from The Desire of Ages in the Flashlight section of this lesson and imagine how Simeon and Anna must have lived each day. How would you describe their experience as they discovered that the Messiah had been born and was before their very eyes? What lesson is there in this passage for you today?

Wednesday
As you read the passages listed in the Punch Lines section of this week’s lesson, which verse speaks most prominently to you today? Which verse are you least familiar with?

Rewrite these two passages in your own words but try not to use any of the major words or phrases already in the text.

Thursday
Imagine if this story were to take place today, and based on the way you currently watch and wait for God to reveal Himself to you, would you be among those who recognized Christ, or those who were preoccupied with other things? Show where you would be on the continuum.

Friday
Reflect on the scene portrayed in Luke 2:21-39 and put yourself in the Temple that day. How would you respond to Simeon’s words? What would you think and say if you saw Anna’s reaction to the news? What can you learn from Simeon and Anna this week?

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
The wise men had seen a mysterious light in the heavens upon that night when the glory of God flooded the hills of Bethlehem. As the light faded, a luminous star appeared, and lingered in the sky. It was not a fixed star nor a planet, and the phenomenon excited the keenest interest. That star was a distant company of shining angels, but of this the wise men were ignorant” (The Desire of Ages, p. 60).

“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

(Matthew 2:2, NIV)
Imagine the wise men arriving in your town at Christmas in today’s world as if transported through time. These learned men have studied the night sky and the prophetic writings of old. They arrive expecting to find Jesus easily. To their amazement they find none who know about His birth.

As news crews converge, the visitors look about and see colored lights, repeated images of a large bearded man wearing red, people scurrying from store to store, and numerous signs declaring Happy Holidays. Although they deeply believe that a holy day has indeed arrived, they see no sign of Him. “Who are you? Why are you here?” asks an excited reporter. “We are Magi. We have come in search of Jesus, to worship Him,” replies one of the regally robed travelers. “Do you know where we may find Him?”

How would you respond?

The precise number of wise men is unknown. Three is presumed because they presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Those items were the most valuable of that day, all gifts literally fit for a king yet also holding symbolic value. Gold, an always highly valuable commodity throughout history, was an appropriate gift for a king. Frankincense was used in making incense, a gift appropriate for a priest. Myrrh was an embalming agent, used by the Egyptians with their mummies. These gifts symbolize Jesus was King, Priest, and Savior who would die to save us from the consequence of sin.

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. . . .

“He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.’ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. . . .

“On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. . . .

“When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’

“After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’”

(Matthew 2:1-3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16-23, NIV)
"But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9, NIV).

"His mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you'" (Luke 2:48, NIV).

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:8-10, NIV).

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6, NIV).

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?" (Luke 15:4, NIV).

"Wise men still seek Him."
—Author unknown.

"O star of wonder, star of night, /Star with royal beauty bright, /Westward leading, still proceeding, /Guide us to thy perfect light."—John H. Hopkins, 19th-century Episcopal priest and hymn writer.

"As in Paradise, God walks in Scripture, seeking man."—St. Ambrose, 4th-century Bishop of Milan.
Sabbath

Matthew 2:3 notes that Herod and all of Jerusalem became alarmed at the words of the Magi. Had they truly accepted the fact that Jesus had come as prophesied, that would mean their lives would be affected, their plans impacted. So, too, our lives and plans are affected by His coming, then and soon-to-come. The fictional modern-day reporter, and the stunned millions who saw the report, would doubtless be just as vexed as were the Jewish priests at His first coming who simply could not conceive that the time had come for deliverance. Do you see the Child Savior at Christmas and each day of your life? Do you share the viewpoint of many that Christ is increasingly being removed from Christmas and from the national culture in general? Explain your answer.

Sunday

As you read the account of the birth of Jesus, much happens in a very short time that directly and strikingly fulfills prophecies that had been given long before.

First advent prophecies fulfilled:
• Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
• Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
• Slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem (Jeremiah 31:15).
• Coming from Egypt (Hosea 11:1).
• Messiah to come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).

We’re counseled by Ellen White that “the end will come more quickly than men expect” (The Great Controversy, p. 631). With spiritual eyesight, and an eye toward those who failed to realize His first advent, we’ll see the signs of His coming. We’ll be the wise men and wise women seeking His second advent. Will you be among the wise? How have you sought Him today?

Monday

The wise men were looking for Jesus, led by their study, the Holy Spirit, and an angelic beacon specially provided to show them the way. Convinced they were on the right path, they incredulously realized they were virtually alone in their awareness that the fullness of time had come. What lessons can be learned today from that scenario?

The wise men looked to the east and saw the sign of His coming. So, too, will those alive in the last days look to the east and see the sign of His second coming. Ellen White states in The Great Controversy, pages 640, 641: “Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Savior and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. . . .”

Tuesday

The Flashlight quote in which Ellen White reveals that the Christmas star was actually a band of angels presents a wonderful opportunity for Seventh-day Adventists. However, there are stories each Christmas that suggest the star was a comet, an alignment of certain planets, or a supernova. This opens up a natural opportunity to talk about the role of a modern-day prophet. Many people seem especially attuned to spiritual discussion at Christmas and can readily see the plausibility of angels being involved, given their involvement with the shepherds when they proclaimed His birth. Have you ever interjected the knowledge you have into such conversation? How do you seek Jesus today? Do you find Him in the words of the Bible? the embrace of a loved one? the smile of a parent? the expectant eyes of a child? the beauty of a glorious sunset?

Wednesday

Our Other Eyes section reminds us that we not only seek God, but He also seeks us. Is there a connection between the idea of people searching for Jesus and the knowledge that He is even more interested in seeking us? One day we will seek Him no more for we shall behold Him face-to-face.

Thursday

Do you actively seek Jesus yourself? Where do you look for Him? Are you in places where you’d expect to find Him? List several ways in which you believe Jesus can be found.

Friday

In the game “hide-and-seek,” children often place themselves where the seeker can’t help finding them! How are you positioning yourself so God can find you? What changes can you make in your life so that you can be found by God more easily?

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

this week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages, chapter 6.
Jesus did not ignore His relation to His earthly parents. From Jerusalem He returned home with them, and aided them in their life of toil. He hid in His own heart the mystery of His mission, waiting submissively for the appointed time for Him to enter upon His work. For eighteen years after He had recognized that He was the Son of God, He acknowledged the tie that bound Him to the home at Nazareth, and performed the duties of a son, a brother, a friend, and a citizen” (The Desire of Ages, p. 82).
If Jesus were a teenager in my school or neighborhood, I think I’d probably ____ want to hang out with Him, because He’d be really cool.

____ admire Him but not be all that comfortable around Him.

____ think He was weird and maybe even pick on Him a little.

____ ignore or avoid Him.

He Gospels of Matthew and Luke each dedicate a little less than two chapters telling the story of Jesus’ birth. Each of the Gospels gives several chapters to Jesus’ death and resurrection, with most of the pages in between telling the stories of Jesus’ ministry—the stories He told, the sermons He preached, the people He healed. Only Luke spends any time at all on Jesus’ childhood and youth. From about age 2 to age 30, the young Jesus gets only 13 verses—most of those being about His trip to the Temple at age 12. Except for that one story, we know almost nothing about Jesus as a child, as a teenager, and as a young man. We can make guesses based on the descriptions given in Luke 2: He “became strong” and was “filled with wisdom”; He grew “in favor with God and men” (NIV). In other words, He was everything He was supposed to be, appropriate for His age. At 6 He probably didn’t have the same kind of understanding of His heavenly mission and message that He did at 26. He had to grow, learn, and discover who He was, just as we do.

Did you know?

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke each dedicate a little less than two chapters telling the story of Jesus’ birth. Each of the Gospels gives several chapters to Jesus’ death and resurrection, with most of the pages in between telling the stories of Jesus’ ministry—the stories He told, the sermons He preached, the people He healed. Only Luke spends any time at all on Jesus’ childhood and youth. From about age 2 to age 30, the young Jesus gets only 13 verses—most of those being about His trip to the Temple at age 12. Except for that one story, we know almost nothing about Jesus as a child, as a teenager, and as a young man. We can make guesses based on the descriptions given in Luke 2: He “became strong” and was “filled with wisdom”; He grew “in favor with God and men” (NIV). In other words, He was everything He was supposed to be, appropriate for His age. At 6 He probably didn’t have the same kind of understanding of His heavenly mission and message that He did at 26. He had to grow, learn, and discover who He was, just as we do.

What do you think?

INTO THE STORY

“When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

“Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, ‘Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.’

‘Why were you searching for me?’ he asked, ‘Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?’ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

“Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

(Luke 2:39-51, NIV)
punch lines

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12, NIV).

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, NIV).

“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck” (Proverbs 1:8, 9, NIV).

“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Proverbs 22:6, NIV).

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. . . . Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1, 4, NIV).

OUT OF THE STORY

Do you think Jesus did “typical toddler” things when He was 2 or 3—like throwing His toys, yelling when He wanted something, or running away from His parents? Are those things sins, or just a normal part of a child’s development?

How might Mary and Joseph have taught Jesus when He was a child? Do you think they raised Him differently from how they raised their other children?

Was Jesus being rebellious when He left His parents in the Temple? Was it thoughtless of Him not to tell them where He was? Explain your answer.

How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when Jesus said, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

When Mary “treasured all these things in her heart,” what do you think she was thinking about?

[Editor’s note: Book cited for discussion purposes. See Monday’s section.]

“Another time Jesus went into the street and a boy running by rushed into his shoulder; at which Jesus became angry and said to him, You will go no farther. And he instantly fell down dead: Which when some persons saw, they said, Where was this boy born, that everything which he says presently comes to pass?—From the Second Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ, a Syrian apocryphal book written about 200 years after the time of Jesus.
Sabbath

Because Jesus never sinned, we know that He didn’t go through a “rebellious teenager” phase. But the story of His visit to the Temple (Luke 2:41-49) shows Jesus at age 12 doing something most young people do as they enter their teens: establishing His own identity, independent of His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. Jesus was finding His own path and discovering His destiny. Even though He wasn’t rebellious or rude, His new independence caused Mary and Joseph some worry and stress.

What does this tell us? That it’s normal for everyone, even Jesus, to move apart from their parents and become a little more independent in their teens. And it’s normal for every parent—even Mary and Joseph!—to worry about their kids. But it’s also possible as a teen to go through that search for independence without rebelling against or getting angry with your parents. The story in Luke 2 ends by telling us that Jesus went back home and “was obedient” to His parents during His teen and young adult years, even as He was growing up into the person God had planned for Him to be.

What can you learn from this story that you can apply at this time in your life?

Sunday

Why do you think the Bible tells us so little about Jesus’ early years?

Early Christians obviously wanted to know more about the young Jesus, and in later centuries some people made up stories about what Jesus might have been like as a boy (one of these is quoted in Other Eyes above, and we’ll discuss that tomorrow). But the inspired words of the Gospels contain only one story about Jesus’ youth.

For each of the following phrases from Luke 2, write an example of something you think Jesus as a child or teen might have done that would fit with that description:

Jesus became strong ________________
Jesus was filled with wisdom __________
The grace of God was upon Him __________
Jesus was obedient to His parents __________
Jesus grew in stature _________________
Jesus grew in favor with God _____________
Jesus grew in favor with man _____________

Monday

Read the Key Text summing up Jesus’ early life, then compare it to the story from the “Infancy Gospel” in the Other Eyes section of the lesson. The “Infancy Gospel” is a book that the early Christian church decided was not inspired and should not be included in the Scriptures. Why do you think they decided this? How does the picture of the boy Jesus in this story differ from the Jesus we see in Luke 2 and in the rest of the Gospels? Does this seem like the “real Jesus”? Why or why not?

Tuesday

Read the Flashlight section of the lesson, which talks about the time between Jesus’ visit to the Temple at 12 and the time He began His ministry at age 30. Why do you think Jesus waited for so long before He started preaching and teaching, if He already knew what God wanted Him to do? What valuable lessons do you think Jesus learned during those years in Nazareth?

Wednesday

All the verses in the Punch Lines section contain biblical advice to parents or to children. From that list of Bible texts (or other Bible verses you know of), is there something you wish your parents would follow that they don’t follow now?

Friday

As you pray today, ask God to make you more like Jesus as a young person—learning about Him and growing in a way that’s appropriate to your age and in keeping with His will.

Is there something you could do differently in relating to your parents, based on the Bible’s advice?

Thursday

Jesus spent 18 years, between ages 12 and 30, learning what God wanted Him to do—and only about three years doing it. Action is important, but so is waiting for God’s timing and learning the lessons He wants us to learn. Think of Moses, who spent 40 years in the wilderness preparing to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Maybe this is your time of preparation. God is getting you ready for the work He wants you to do in the world. What’s one practical thing you can do today to help discover God’s will for your life?

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
“And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.’ Before the birth of John, the angel had said, ‘He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.’ God had called the son of Zacharias to a great work, the greatest ever committed to men” (The Desire of Ages, p. 100).
what
do you think?

Describe below the weirdest person you have ever seen.

How did they look (face, facial expression, etc.)? 

How were they dressed?

How did they speak?

How did the way that the person looked, dressed, and spoke affect your perception of them?

into
the
story

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”’

“John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father.” I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

“‘I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’

“Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then John consented.

“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

(Matthew 3, NIV)
“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27, NIV).

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20, NIV).

“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, NIV).


“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

“In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity.” —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 19th-century American poet.

“Repentance is a grace of God’s Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.” —Thomas J. Watson, Sr., founder of IBM.
By any measure, John the Baptist was one of the most interesting figures in the entire Bible. He looked weird, dressed differently, and preached a unique message. Read Matthew 3:4 again. Wouldn’t it have made more sense for God to dress him up like everyone else so that he could blend in with the local people and share his message? Why did God set him apart in the way that he looked, and even in what he ate?

What does this tell you about how much God cares about how you look and what you eat?

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Read the Into the Story section, then complete the Out of the Story questions. What sins did John the Baptist rebuke the Pharisees for committing?

Why did John’s message focus so much on confessing one’s sins and repenting of them?

Why did John aim such harsh words at the Pharisees?

---

Read this week’s Key Text. As compliments go, this is one of the best ones in the Bible. Jesus recognized the special role that John the Baptist played in preparing the way for His ministry.

Write down something that you would like Jesus to say about the way that you live your life for Him.

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In today’s Flashlight quotation, Ellen White notes that John the Baptist grew up far away from the city—actually, in the desert. He was a country boy.

Why do you think God chose to raise John the Baptist in this way?

How did John’s simple upbringing help him recognize sin?

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Read the Punch Lines for this week. Focus on 1 Corinthians 1:27. What do you think are some of the foolish things that God uses to confound or confuse the wise?

Explain how the meaning of this verse relates to the life and ministry of John the Baptist.

What was it about John the Baptist that made people travel long distances to go see and hear him?

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God can use anyone who is willing to be His vessel. God has called you to ministry for Him, perhaps not in the same public way as John the Baptist. Even if you are ridiculed for this, know that God will be with you.

Have you been baptized? If you have not, what’s stopping you?

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Ellen White wrote of John the Baptist: “John was to go forth as Jehovah’s messenger, to bring to men the light of God. He must give a new direction to their thoughts. He must impress them with the holiness of God’s requirements, and their need of His perfect righteousness” (The Desire of Ages, p. 100).

What impression are you leaving on those who know you?

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At www.InsightMagazine.org you can join the Web forum and help shape the future. Discuss the Sabbath School lessons in a virtual community.

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This week’s reading*
The Desire of Ages, chapters 10, 11.

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*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
Many claim that it was impossible for Christ to be overcome by temptation. Then He could not have been placed in Adam’s position; He could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain. If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. We have nothing to bear which He has not endured” (The Desire of Ages, p. 117).

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.”

(Luke 4:1, 2, NIV)
what do you think?

From the list below, check the top five temptations that you believe most teens would struggle to overcome.

- Saying something “nasty” to someone
- Buying clothes you don’t need
- Visiting X-rated Web sites on the Internet
- Eating junk food
- Lying to your parents
- Procrastinating on your homework
- Cheating on a test at school
- Stealing your friend’s MP3 player.
- Other ______________________

INTO THE STORY

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

“The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Man does not live on bread alone.”’

“The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.’

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”’

“The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ‘If you are the Son of God,’ he said, ‘throw yourself down from here. For it is written: “He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”’

“Jesus answered, ‘It says: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”’

“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘the Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’”

(Luke 4:1-19, NIV)

did you know?

Luke 4:1 tells us that Jesus was “led” by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. In the original Greek, the language in which these verses were written, the verb “led” doesn’t only mean that Jesus was directed to go into temptation in the wilderness and left there to fight Satan alone. The Holy Spirit was leading Jesus when He was fasting, and the Holy Spirit went into temptation with Him.
“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Peter 5:8, 9, NIV).

“Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness” (Romans 6:13, NIV).

“Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12, NIV).

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (Revelation 22:12, NIV).

“The virtue of achievement is victory over oneself. Those who know this can never know defeat.” —A. J. Cronin, 20th-century Scottish novelist and dramatist.

“Some temptations come to the industrious, but all temptations attack the idle.” —Charles H. Spurgeon, 19th-century English preacher.

“Theology is the wholesome soil of virtue, where patience, honor, sweet humility, and calm fortitude take root and strongly flourish.” —David Mallet, 18th-century Scottish dramatist and poet.
Sabbath

Look again at the temptations in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. How do they compare to the temptations that Jesus faced in the wilderness? Explain._____________________

Think of one of the three temptations that Satan tried to get Jesus to succumb to. Are there any temptations on the What Do You Think? list similar to the ones that Jesus faced? __________________________

_____________________________

Read Genesis 3:1-7. Do you notice any similarities between Adam and Eve’s temptation in the garden, the temptations we face, and the ones aimed at Jesus?_____________

_____________________________

Sunday

After reading the Into the Story section, complete the Out of the Story questions. Satan attacked Jesus after 40 days of fasting. Do you think Satan wanted to try to make Jesus fall while He was in a weakened state? Explain your answer.

_____________________________

What do you think are some of the benefits of fasting?

_____________________________

Jesus met each of Satan’s temptations with a clear “it is written.” What Bible do you think Jesus was quoting from?

_____________________________

Jesus had a deep knowledge of the Old Testament writings of people such as Moses and Isaiah. He knew God’s Word and that was why He was so successful in defeating the devil.

Monday

This week’s Key Text states that Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” when He entered into the wilderness to be tempted. What do you think it means to be full of the Holy Spirit? ______________

Read John 16:13. What role does the Holy Spirit play when we face temptation?

_____________________________

The Holy Spirit didn’t leave Jesus when He faced a trying time; the Holy Spirit was right there inside of Jesus, keeping all His faculties sharp to fend off Satan’s attacks.

_____________________________

Tuesday

Read this week’s Flashlight quotation again. Now read James 1:13. If God cannot be tempted with sin, and He doesn’t tempt humanity with sin, how do we explain the fact that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness?

When Jesus came to pay our penalty for humanity’s sin, He had to give up some things. For instance, Jesus never called on His awesome power to get Him out of trouble, not even when He faced Satan himself.

What does the Flashlight quotation tell you about how much God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love us?

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Wednesday

Take a look at this week’s Punch Lines. Which one of the verses speaks to you right now?

Did you know that Isaiah wrote his verse about Jesus almost 700 years before Jesus was born? Jesus’ victory over the temptations of Satan was predicted centuries before Jesus walked the earth.

Do you think Satan knew of Isaiah’s prophecy about Jesus? Explain.

_____________________________

Since Satan was unable to overcome Jesus, to whom has he turned his attention (1 Peter 5:8, 9)? Choose and memorize a Punch Line scripture that will help you stand against Satan’s temptations.

Thursday

On the lines below, list three practical steps that can help you overcome temptation.

_____________________________

_____________________________

_____________________________

Now read James 4:7, 8. What tips can you take from these verses to help you stand for God at all times?

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Friday

Is there an area of your life in which you feel powerless to resist Satan? Is there a temptation binding you? Why not pause right now and ask God to help you overcome that temptation.

_____________________________

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this week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages, chapters 12, 13.

*A special adaptation of The Desire of Ages has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
Philip said to Nathanael, ‘Come and see.’ He did not ask him to accept another’s testimony, but to behold Christ for himself. Now that Jesus has ascended to heaven, His disciples are His representatives among men, and one of the most effective ways of winning souls to Him is in exemplifying His character in our daily life. . . . Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power in the world” (The Desire of Ages, pp. 141, 142).

“Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ ‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked. ‘Come and see,’ said Philip.”

(John 1:45, 46, NIV)
What do you think?

Which of the following do you think has the greatest power to influence others for Christ? Rank them (1 being the most, 5 being the least) according to the influence you think they have over others?

- To have their questions answered in a biblically clear and coherent manner
- To observe joy and contentment in the way someone else lives their life
- To receive help and compassion in a time of need from a believer with no strings attached
- To discover the truth about Christ through a quality media form
- To be invited to participate in the social and spiritual activities of a community of faith (church, small groups, socials, etc.)
- To witness a believer endure faithfully through serious trials and still praise God

Which do you think would compel you to follow Christ? Why?

did you know?

Guile” is a Greek word that means “deceit, duplicity (two-facedness), and dishonesty.” The word was also used to describe fish bait. When Jesus refers to Nathanael as a “true Israelite” in whom there is no “guile” He offers a rare moment of high praise. Perhaps this is one of the higher compliments anyone can receive.

Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

“Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter).

“The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

“Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’

‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’ Nathanael asked.

‘Come and see,’ said Philip.

“When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, ‘Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false.’

‘How do you know me?’ Nathanael asked.

“Jesus answered, ‘I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.’

“Then Nathanael declared, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.’

“Jesus said, ‘You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that.’ He then added, ‘I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.’”

(John 1:35-51)
“I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me” (Proverbs 8:17, NASB).

“He settled on twelve, and designated them apostles. The plan was that they would be with him, and he would send them out to proclaim the Word and give them authority to banish demons” (Mark 3:14-16, Message).

“Then Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light’” (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT).

“Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don’t let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own whim but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me” (John 6:37, 38, Message).

“Jesus said to her, ‘Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?’” (John 11:40, NASB).

“The men who followed Him were unique in their generation. They turned the world upside down because their hearts had been turned right side up. The world has never been the same.”—Billy Graham, current American evangelist.

“Jesus promised His disciples three things: that they would be entirely fearless, absurdly happy, and that they would get into trouble.”—W. Russell Maltby, 20th-century British Wesleyan minister.
Sabbath
Read and respond to the activity in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. Which do you think causes people to become interested in following Christ? Scan through the four Gospels or think of three people who were motivated to follow Christ by different means. Even though everyone responds to different aspects of who Jesus is, Christ in Matthew 11:28 calls everyone to “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (NLT). What kind of rest do you think Jesus brings?

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Sunday
As you read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to prompt your study of the text, pay attention to the different types of people who are drawn to Christ. What does Christ do to endear Himself to would-be disciples? Why do you think Jesus said, “Come and see”? Why does Philip repeat the appeal when Nathanael raises the question of where Jesus is from? What is the message you think God is trying to say to you in this week’s lesson?

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Monday
The Key Text from John 1:45, 46 conveys the conversation between Philip and Nathanael about whether Jesus could be the Messiah. What do you think Philip was certain about when he said that if Nathanel would just meet Jesus (come and see) that he would be compelled to follow? When in your life have preconceived ideas about a person turned out to be wrong?

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Tuesday
Read the quote from The Desire of Ages in the Flashlight section of this lesson. Think about the effectiveness of a person’s personal story. When have you been touched by someone’s story about how they came to know Christ? If you were to tell one story from your own life about what God has done for you, what story would you tell? Why?

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Wednesday
As you read the passages listed in the Punch Lines section of this week’s lesson, which verse speaks most prominently to you today? Why do you think this verse is particularly relevant to you today?

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Thursday
Ruminate on the interactions Jesus had with the many different types of people throughout the Gospels. Why do you think people were so drawn to Him? If Jesus were here on earth in the same way today, what would draw people to Him? How would He be received?

_______________________________
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Friday
Whom do you know that is not a disciple of Christ but you sense it may be the right time in their life to respond? Begin to pray for that person specifically each day and be ready to share your story about why you have chosen to follow Christ. Your testimony has power! Look for an opportunity to invite them to “come and see” for themselves.

_______________________________

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“Jesus did not begin His ministry by some great work before the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem. At a household gathering in a little Galilean village His power was put forth to add to the joy of a wedding feast. Thus He showed His sympathy with men, and His desire to minister to their happiness. In the wilderness of temptation He Himself had drunk the cup of woe. He came forth to give to men the cup of blessing, by His benediction to hallow the relations of human life” (The Desire of Ages, p. 144).

Scripture Story: John 2:1-11.
Commentary: The Desire of Ages, chapter 15.

“After she had given him a drink, she said, ‘I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking’” (Genesis 24:19, NIV).

keytext

“They, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

(John 2:11, NIV)
If Jesus showed up at a party with me and my friends, I would

- invite Him to come in and have fun with us.
- ask Him to perform a miracle.
- stop the party and have a Bible study.
- start hiding things that I know He wouldn’t approve of.
- leave quickly.
- ask Him to leave.

did you know?

At Jewish weddings, the bride is veiled and the groom checks to make sure it’s really his bride under the veil, as a reminder of the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah in Genesis 29. The bride often circles the groom seven times to show that he is central to her thoughts and her life, and seven blessings are recited. These wedding customs developed over many years. We don’t know how many of them go back to Bible times, so we can’t know for sure what the wedding that Jesus attended at Cana with His mother and His disciples would have been like. We do know that it was an occasion for feasting and celebration, possibly lasting more than one day and involving family, friends, maybe even the whole community.

INTO THE STORY

“On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine.’

‘Dear woman, why do you involve me?’ Jesus replied. ‘My time has not yet come.’

“His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

“Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water’; so they filled them to the brim.

“They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, ‘Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.’

“This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

(John 2:1-11, NIV)
**OUT OF THE STORY**

Why do you think Jesus chose to perform His first miracle at a wedding?

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Jesus told Mary, “My time has not yet come.” What do you think He meant by this? Why do you think He went ahead and did the miracle anyway?

__________________________________________

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__________________________________________

Why do you think Mary told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them, even though at that point Jesus had said He wasn’t going to get involved? What does this suggest about the relationship between Mary and Jesus?

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__________________________________________

The Bible doesn’t record Jesus’ answer to the master of the banquet. What do you think Jesus might have said?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

How did this miracle reveal Jesus’ glory?

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

**PUNCH LINES**

“**John came neither eating nor drinking,** and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners”’” (Matthew 11:18, 19, NIV).

“The Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and “sinners”?’ Jesus answered them, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’” (Luke 5:30-32, NIV).

“If you do not believe me, even though I do what my Father does, but if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.” (John 10:37, 38, NIV).

“If Christians are forbidden to enjoy the wine of the spirit they will turn to the wine of the flesh.”—A. W. Tozer, 20th-century Protestant preacher and author.

“If I were *not* drinking coffee in a coffee shop I’d be *all* over you/I’d be all over you, you’d be all over me/Here’s to you/Bah! I’m not drinking coffee in a coffee shop—I’m drinking wine/I’m drinking wine, you’re drinking wine/All I want to drink is wine!”—Song lyric, “Wine Into Water,” by T. Graham Brown.
**Sabbath**

Read the Into the Word section of the lesson and think about the questions that follow it. According to this Bible passage, what effect did this miracle have on Jesus’ disciples?

_______________________________

_______________________________

Why do you think the disciples reacted this way? How would you have reacted if you had been there and seen Jesus do this?

What impact do miracles have on our faith? Have you ever seen a miracle? If so, how did it affect you? If not, do you think you need a miracle in order to really believe in Jesus?

**Sunday**

Look back at the What Do You Think? section of the lesson. Imagine Jesus coming in to a party where you are enjoying yourself with your friends. Would He join in the fun, or would He be unhappy with what was going on? How do you know? What does the story of the wedding feast tell you about how Jesus feels when people are celebrating and having fun?

Write a paragraph in which you describe what you think Jesus might do if He showed up at one of your parties.

**Monday**

Read this week’s Key Text. It tells us that this first miracle helped build up the disciples’ faith in Jesus. Look in John 4, Luke 4 and 5, and Mark 1 to see what some of Jesus’ other early miracles were. List five in the chart below, and for each one write what you think the disciples might have thought after seeing it.

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<tr>
<th>Miracle</th>
<th>What the Disciples Thought</th>
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**Tuesday**

Read the Flashlight section. This passage contrasts the suffering Jesus went through when He was being tempted in the wilderness (see Matthew 4 or Luke 4) with the joy and happiness that He brought to others when He performed His first miracle at the wedding feast.

Why do you think that going through a difficult time Himself made Jesus able to bring joy and blessings to others?

How could you use a difficult time in your life to help and bless other people?

**Wednesday**

The first two texts in the Punch Lines section talk about how Jesus was criticized for going to parties and hanging out with sinners. Some people thought Jesus didn’t take His mission seriously enough—they were angry that He enjoyed eating and drinking and being with people.

Jesus performed His first miracle at a party—not to save a life, but to help people have a good time. What do you think this tells us:

about Jesus? ___________________________  
about His mission on earth? _______________

about the kind of miracles He could do? ___________________________

**Thursday**

Some people think God doesn’t want us to have a good time, that He disapproves when people are having fun. Jesus’ life—especially the miracle at Cana—shows how untrue this is. It’s true that some things that go on at parties are definitely not God’s will. But Jesus enjoyed a good time. He celebrated life with His disciples and friends. And He enjoys watching us celebrate in healthy, positive ways too.

Think of an activity that you and some friends—or perhaps you and your Sabbath School class—can plan to help demonstrate the fact that God likes to see His people having a good time together. After you brainstorm some ideas, discuss them with a friend.

**Friday**

Jesus’ miracle of turning the water into wine suggests that He can take ordinary things in our lives and transform them into something special. What needs to be transformed in your life today? How can you ask Jesus to turn your “water” into “wine”?

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.*
God designed that the temple at Jerusalem should be a continual witness to the high destiny open to every soul. But the Jews had not understood the significance of the building they regarded with so much pride. They did not yield themselves as holy temples for the Divine Spirit. The courts of the temple at Jerusalem, filled with the tumult of unholy traffic, represented all too truly the temple of the heart, defiled by the presence of sensual passion and unholy thoughts” (The Desire of Ages, p. 161).
If you were to come to church on Sabbath and find that the sanctuary was being used as a market, with different tables set up and people selling their goods, how do you think you would react?

Define the word “materialism.”

Write down five different materialistic traits people can have.

1. _______________________
2. _______________________
3. _______________________
4. _______________________
5. _______________________

“After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

“In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’

“His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’

Then the Jews demanded of him, ‘What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ The Jews replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?’

“But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

“After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”

(John 2:12-22, NIV)
punch lines

“Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Corinthians 7:1, NIV).

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28).

“Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:30, NIV).

“Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life” (Proverbs 22:4, NIV).

“To fear the Lord is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (Proverbs 8:13, NIV).

OUT OF THE STORY

Was greed a factor in this story? Explain.

What do you think Jesus meant when He said “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days”?

Why do you think the Jews reacted as they did to Jesus’ actions?

When Jesus made a whip out of cords, were you surprised to see Him demonstrate anger? Why or why not?

In what ways did the people demonstrate materialism?

What do you think Jesus was thinking when He saw the most holy place turned into a place of business and profit?

In our materialistic world in which we live today, how can we refrain from becoming immersed in it?

Define the word “reverence.”

Think of how easy it could have been for these people in the Temple to justify their materialism and greed in the name of God and religion. In what ways can we be in danger of doing the same thing?

“Increase of material comforts, it may be generally laid down, does not in any way whatsoever contribute to moral growth.”—Mahatma Gandhi, 20th-century Indian political and spiritual leader.

“It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents men from living freely and nobly.”—Henry David Thoreau, 19th-century U.S. author.

“As there is no worldly gain without some loss so there is no worldly loss without some gain.”—Francis Quarles, 17th-century English metaphysical poet.
**Sabbath**

Take a few moments to write down a few ways in which you can slowly eliminate materialism from your life.

After writing everything down, read through today’s lesson of John 2:12-22 and highlight the parts from which you think you can learn the most.

**Sunday**

When you realize how big God is in contrast to how small we are, we should realize that the things of this world don’t matter much. Remember that God is your Creator and He created you in His own image. Realize that such a great love should call for reverence. Go about your day trying to think of different ways in which you can show your reverence, respect, and love for God. Remember, everything in your life, whether insignificant or monumental, means something to God. You may think the little things you do don’t make a difference, but they do. God sees all things; He sees your small sacrifices as well as your large ones. Read through Psalm 104. Remember that if God can set the earth on its foundations, He can surely hear every little prayer, and see every secret thing. He will never forget you.

**Monday**

Believe it or not, just as it was mentioned in the Key Text, there are still many examples of materialism inside church leaders today. You hear stories about church leaders stealing money from their flocks. People sometimes can’t comprehend the ways in which their irreverence shows disrespect to their Creator. In the Temple Jesus showed His anger in His attempt to get the people to understand that all the sacrifices were sacred and were pointing to His great one on the cross. Think of what went through His mind when He saw people turning their place of worship into a place of thievery, materialism, and corruption. How can this story make us more aware of how we should show reverence to our Creator and Savior?

**Tuesday**

One day you might be in a situation in which you must choose between a materialistic life or one in which money isn’t so supreme. God knows where each choice you make is going to lead you, even if it seems innocent and worthy. Always remember that in every choice we make, we are temples of God’s Spirit, and God should be present. Don’t think that praying over the little things won’t make a difference. Before taking any steps forward, pray and seek God’s will. Write down three different situations that can seem harmless, yet could also possibly end in irreverence to God.

1. ________________
2. ________________
3. ________________

**Wednesday**

Remember that many people in this world have lost much and suffer immensely. Some don’t have enough food to eat and/or can’t even afford to put clothes on their backs. In our society, many of us may not be considered rich compared to many famous people, yet if we were to visit some of these countries, we would be seen as having the wealth of kings and queens. We should remember how blessed we are and realize how much we really have compared to so many others.

**Thursday**

In the Other Eyes section we saw the quote from Gandhi about how an increase in wealth doesn’t mean an increase in morals. Think about some rich people you hear about in the news (or maybe even know) who seem to live very immoral lives. In fact, there have been stories about hard-working, honest people who after gaining wealth get greedy, nasty, and hateful. Their money made them worse people!

Why do you think that is so? Why does money sometimes do that to people? How can tithing and giving away money to charity and other causes help to prevent money from ruining people morally?

**Friday**

Many wealthy people, including celebrities, are so rich and yet are so miserable. Many people think that money will make them happy; they think that if they become famous and rich all of their problems will be solved. Yet many of the rich and famous have been immersed in suffering and misery. Remember how Solomon acquired so much wealth that it eventually started to steer him away from God. We should remember that no matter how much material things we can acquire on this earth, they don’t guarantee happiness.

*A special adaptation of The Desire of Ages has been created just for you by the White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

**this week’s reading**

*The Desire of Ages, chapter 16.*

*By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.*
flashlight

“It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission” (The Desire of Ages, p. 171).

keytext

“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

(John 3:12-15, NIV)
If you were to describe your conversion to Christ with a type of weather, which would you choose? Explain.

____ Sunny  ____ Overcast
____ Rainy  ____ Stormy
____ Cloudy  ____ Icy

_____________________________________
____________________________________
___________________________________
__________________________________

INTO THE STORY

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

"In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'

"'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked.

"'You are Israel’s teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.'"

(John 3:1-18, NIV)
“He was in the world, the world was there through him, and yet the world didn’t even notice. He came to his own people, but they didn’t want him. But whoever did want him, who believed he was who he claimed and would do what he said, he made to be their true selves, their child-of-God selves” (John 1:10-12, Message).

“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures” (James 1:18, NASB).

“Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?” (Isaiah 40:13, 14, ESV).

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him” (1 John 5:1, ESV).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3, NASB).

“We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little; many services but few conversions; much machinery but few results.” —Reuben Archer Torrey, 19th-20th-century American preacher and evangelist.

“A baptism of holiness, a demonstration of godly living is the crying need of our day.” —Duncan Campbell, 20th-century Scottish minister.
Sabbath
Read and respond to the activity in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. Metaphors can capture our experiences and convey them in creative ways. Young people who grow up in a community of faith often feel like they have no conversion story because their journey seems spread out over the years. But Nicodemus was in fact a teacher/leader in the Jewish faith before he discovered the kingdom as Christ taught him. Read Philippians 1:6 and reflect on the seasons of spiritual awakening in your life.

Sunday
As you read the Scripture story of Nicodemus, use the questions in the Out of the Story section to guide your study. What parts of the story are new to you? Why do you think this story is included in the Gospel of John? Nicodemus is an example of someone who was religious, and his heart was open to Jesus, but it took time for his devotion to become resolute. Who do you know that has been close to the faith but over time became genuinely passionate for Christ? In what way is their story an inspiration to you?

Monday
The Key Text from John 3:12-15 connects with the Old Testament event that was a forecast of Calvary. Read Numbers 21:6-9 and compare that story with the Key Text for this week. How can you keep your eyes focused on Christ throughout the course of a normal week?

Tuesday
Read the quote from The Desire of Ages in the Flashlight section of this lesson. What are some examples of “theoretical knowledge” as compared to “spiritual regeneration”? When have you experienced both? Whom do you know well who has experienced real spiritual regeneration? How is their life different because of their experience?

Wednesday
As you read the passages listed in the Punch Lines section of this week's lesson, which verse speaks to your life today? In what way do you resonate with Nicodemus and his experience with Christ?

Thursday
Make a list of five spiritual moments in your life that were key turning points in your relationship with Christ. Briefly describe how you were impacted each time. Take time to pray and thank God for each specific event as it drew you closer and closer to God.

Friday
The words of Christ to Nicodemus touched on being “born of water and spirit.” Jesus knew Nicodemus would understand this because every religious teacher knew of the significance of baptism and “the new birth.” Have you considered becoming born again through baptism? Why do you think understanding the rebirth portion of this story is important to understanding baptism?

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At www.InsightMagazine.org you can join the Web forum and help shape the future. Discuss the Sabbath School lessons in a virtual community. Insight has stories of people today from which you can learn practical ideas for reality living.

this week’s reading*
The Desire of Ages, chapter 17.
"John had by nature the faults and weaknesses common to humanity, but the touch of divine love had transformed him. He dwelt in an atmosphere uncontaminated with selfishness and ambition, and far above the miasma of jealousy. He manifested no sympathy with the dissatisfaction of his disciples, but showed how clearly he understood his relation to the Messiah, and how gladly he welcomed the One for whom he had prepared the way" (The Desire of Ages, p. 179).
Rank the following people in the order of who you think should be the most humble.

___ Politicians ___ Wal-Mart cashiers ___ Movie stars ___ Business people
___ Parents ___ Sports stars ___ Teachers ___ Prisoners
___ Teenagers ___ Pastors ___ Astronauts ___ Pastors

Which of the following characteristics matter most to you in another person: compassion, consideration, friendliness, generosity, honesty, humbleness, humorous, integrity, intelligence, sensitivity, or thoughtfulness?

A survey was recently taken at Ekamai International School in Bangkok, Thailand. The majority of students at this school are Buddhist. On the survey, students from grades 9-12 had to rank 11 characteristics they most desired in another person. Humility was one of those characteristics. Across the board—whether Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, or Christian—humility ranked low on the desirable characteristics. Only 10 people ranked it as number one. That’s only 0.032 percent of the respondents. The score is only marginally better for those who put humility in the top five—0.43 percent.

One respondent wrote: “A humble person is charming...and that’s what I would like to be like. This kind of person is really hard to find.” Another one commented, “To be humble is the beginning of everything.”

Interesting is that the number one choice was honesty. Forty-three percent of respondents chose honesty as the most desirable characteristic.

“After [Jesus had met with Nicodemus, he] and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John’s disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing and everyone is going to him.’

“To this John replied, ‘A man can receive only what is given from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, “I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.” The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.’”

(John 3:22-36, NIV)
punch lines

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:5-9, NIV).

“The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11, 12, NIV).

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19, 20, NIV).

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18, NIV).

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. . . . Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-45, 48, NIV).

OUT OF THE STORY

Why do you think the people were constantly coming to John to be baptized?

What do you think was the real reason behind John the Baptist’s disciples complaining about more people listening to Jesus than to John?

What does John’s illustration about the bridegroom tell us about John the Baptist?

What is the main point John is trying to make?

How does this message impact how I am to live?

How can I “testify to what I have seen and heard”?

other eyes

“I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors and to retrace my steps.”—Mahatma Gandhi, 20th-century Indian philosopher, internationally known for his doctrine of nonviolent protest.

“Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.”—Thomas Merton, 20th-century American Trappist monk.
Sabbath

In the What Do You Think? section you were asked to rank a list of people as to who should be the most humble. Unfortunately, humility is not a characteristic that we show too often. We are quick to anger when things do not go our way. Think about the people you encounter on a daily basis: teachers, parents, teenagers, cashiers. In the last year, which one has shown the most humility? Briefly write the circumstances and why it stands out in your memory.

Tuesday

In the Flashlight section we see that John’s task was to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. That was the only task that God called John to do. John delighted in the task and was a witness to its successful-ness as people flocked to Jesus. John had a deeper understanding. Surrounded as he was by human nature, he understood his part in God’s work. And it was time for his job to be over. Instead of letting his disciples pull him in to hindering Jesus’ work, he expressed his joy at working with Jesus, and then slowly step back and let Jesus take over completely.

Wednesday

Being meek and merciful is closely related to being humble. But people often mistake a meek or merciful person for someone who is submissive to others. What do you think? Read through the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and write what you think meek, merciful, peacemaker, and pure in heart really mean.

Thursday

Take another look at Mahatma Gandhi’s quote in the Other Eyes section. In nearly all Asian countries, including India where Mahatma Gandhi lived, saving face is most important. To admit that you made an error would be to lose face. For Gandhi to admit to errors was a big thing in Asia. Because of his humbleness he was instrumental in bringing India into its own country.

People in other countries are not that different. While they may not have the same saving/losing face philosophy, no one likes to admit they make mistakes. But admitting to mistakes and stepping back to correct or apologize is a form of humility. Someone who can admit their errors shows true character, and is often well thought of. What can you admit to today that will allow you to become a more humble person?

Friday

John experienced joy when he allowed Christ to be in charge of his life.

Read Romans 12:10 and Ephesians 4:29. Post those verses somewhere where you will see them every day. Building others up and honoring them above yourself is part of decreasing yourself. This week pray for humility to become second nature to you. Find ways to show humility to those you meet on a daily basis. Encourage your friends to show humility. You never know what may happen. Your classroom may become a better place.

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