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

3—Love Is Patient [p. 5]
We all desire to love and to be loved. But how do we remain sexually pure in a world that doesn’t see love the way God sees it?

10—More Than a Job [p. 9]
When we choose a career, there’s more to consider than merely money. How can we also contribute to God’s cause through it?

17—God’s Eye for the Gay Guy [p. 13]
How can we as Christians love homosexuals and yet not compromise with the sin of a homosexual lifestyle?

24—That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It [p. 17]
When the authorities came to arrest Paul, he asked permission to tell the crowd the story of his conversion experience. Our stories also have powerful potential to change lives.

May

1—Faithful in the Kangaroo Court [p. 21]
We will all be called by Christ to endure trials for Him with character and integrity. What better way to prepare for that future than by today living a life devoted to Him.

8—Wearing Someone Else’s Clothes [p. 25]
To be compassionate is to have a keen sympathy for the suffering of others. What does being “clothed with compassion” look like?

15—A Good Report [p. 29]
Though none of us want to face difficulties and trials, we can view these times as opportunities for lifting up the name of Jesus in our words and deeds.

22—A Part, Not Apart [p. 33]
God provided comfort and companionship to Paul through the loving-kindness of other believers while he was imprisoned. The church today is also meant for that type of unselfish love.

29—Alone but Not Defenseless [p. 37]
Paul stood trial before Nero without an advocate. No one was willing to speak on his behalf. We may also need to stand alone for Christ, but we will never be without an advocate.

June

5—Love Power [p. 41]
Time spent with Jesus is never wasted time. Lingering in Christ’s presence and embracing His love gives the power to transform our lives. How are others transformed in your presence?

12—Stuck on an Island [p. 45]
The apostle John was keenly aware that his belief in Christ put him at odds with religious and civil leaders. As is often the case, however, that which humanity intends for evil God uses for His glory.

19—Forever Faithful [p. 49]
God has always had a remnant people—those who refuse to compromise with the majority. Are you part of this group?

26—Go Out Like a Light [p. 53]
Many people encourage us to give our lives for “a cause.” But have we chosen a cause that will endure throughout eternity?
**flashlight**

“For he knew that when the soul fails to make this surrender, then sin is not forsaken, the appetites and passions still strive for the mastery, and temptations confuse the conscience. The surrender must be complete. Every weak, doubting, struggling soul who yields fully to the Lord is placed in direct touch with agencies that enable him to overcome. Heaven is near to him, and he has the support and help of angels of mercy in every time of trial and need” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 299).
What statement best describes your position on premarital sex?

1. It’s not that big of a deal. What goes on between consenting adults should be left up to them.
2. I think that you should sleep with someone before marriage, just to make sure you are compatible.
3. I want to wait until I’m married before I share a sexual relationship with anyone.
4. I’m no longer a virgin and I feel a great deal of guilt and shame about that.
5. I’m no longer a virgin and I take pride in that.
6. I don’t know what my position is on premarital sex.

According to a survey done in 2002, by age 20, 75 percent of the American respondents had had premarital sex. In another survey done in 2009, 71 percent of American young adults 18-29 thought that premarital sex was OK. When questioning respondents under 30, they discovered that in the single, sexually active population, 55 percent thought that their sex life was very satisfying. In the married or committed population under 30, 77 percent of the respondents felt that their sex life was very satisfying. Many surveys show that sex within marriage is reported to be “better” and more satisfying. Why do you think that might be? (Taken from: www.publichealthreports.org/userfiles/122_1/12_PHR122_1_73-78.pdf; abcnews.go.com/primetime/pollvault/Story?id=156921&page=2.)
“Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (Genesis 24:67, NIV).

“So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her” (Genesis 29:20, NIV).

“With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose” (Proverbs 7:21, 22, NIV).

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10, NIV).

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV).

“If you love someone you would be willing to give up everything for them, but if they loved you back they’d never ask you to.” —Anonymous.

“What you are as a single person, you will be as a married person, only to a greater degree. Any negative character trait will be intensified in a marriage relationship, because you will feel free to let your guard down—that person has committed himself to you and you no longer have to worry about scaring him off.” —Josh McDowell, American author, preacher.

How do you think we should balance being supportive and loving with standing for our principles?

What difference should there be in our expectations for believers versus nonbelievers?

In 1 Corinthians 13 do you think love is a feeling or an action? Why?

How do you think 1 Corinthians 13 relates to a sexual relationship before marriage and a sexual relationship after marriage?

By looking at these two passages, how do you think God sees sex? Is it a necessary evil? A gift? A wonderful responsibility?

By looking at these passages, how would you define love?
Thursday
First Corinthians 13 talks about the definition of love. All too often, we think of love as an emotion. While we might feel loving feelings from time to time, real love is an action. Do you feel ready for a test and then study for it? Or do you study for a test and then feel ready? Love, the real lasting kind, is an action. When you act loving, when you say kind things, when you put the other person first and practice self-control until the time is right, you will feel those loving feelings.

List 10 ways that you can appropriately show your love for someone special, and beside each write how those loving gestures can make the relationship grow. (Use the note pages in the back of your study guide.)

Friday
What kind of love and relationship do you dream of? What kind of person do you think would make a good partner in life? What do you think you need to do in order to experience that in the future?

Wednesday
In the Bible we can see the most amazing love stories. Jacob was willing to work for seven years before marrying Rachel. He felt that kind of passion. Isaac and Rebekah were in love at first sight. They just fell for each other! Sometimes we’re tempted to think that God’s way is boring and unfulfilling, but if we do things God’s way, we’ll have all the excitement and passion that we long for.

Write down five famous couples from the Bible, and next to each couple write down the first thing you think about them. Did they follow God’s way, or do it the world’s way? How have they been remembered?

Sabbath
Do you think that waiting until you get married to have sex is an unattainable ideal in our modern society? There is a lot of pressure on young people to start having sex in order to have a “normal” relationship, but God is pretty clear in the Bible about what He expects. Second Corinthians 12:9 says that God’s grace is sufficient for us; and that His power is perfected in our weakness. Why not make a vow right now that in your next weak moment you will turn to God for the strength you need?

Sunday
In the two passages in Into the Story the first passage warns us not to associate with people who are doing immoral things. We should be able to witness to others, but for those who call themselves Christians, there should be a certain standard to live up to. The second passage talks about love and how love is the most important aspect of our lives. How can we balance those two teachings? Look up the word “love” in a Bible concordance and look at several random verses. Is it unloving to hold a verse in the Bible concordance and look at several random verses? Is it unloving to hold a verse in the Bible concordance and look at several random verses?

Monday
The key text talks about how we don’t know fully now, but later on we will. Now we see things foggily, but later on we’ll understand it all. This can be related to how we might feel right now. We want to know the person we love fully, and be fully known by them. We want a connection! Look at the following statements and decide if you agree or disagree with them.

1. T F—TV presents realistic relationships, and quickly getting physical shows how much potential a relationship has. T F
2. T F—TV presents a distorted version of relationships, and God’s way is the way that gives us the best chance at a lasting, happy relationship.
3. T F—Intimacy is possible only sexually.
4. T F—If I do things God’s way, no one will want to date me and I’ll be alone.
5. T F—I trust God that if I do things His way, He’ll give me the intimacy I crave.

Tuesday
Having the strength to wait is not easy. In fact, it might even seem impossible. This doesn’t make you a bad person. This makes you human. Of course you want that connection; it’s just a matter of the timing. So how do you wait? God can give you the strength, but only if you are really serious about it. You have to be willing to hand it over to Him complete with your doubts, wishes, longings, and weakness.

Today, write a personal letter to God confessing exactly what you dream to have in the future. Include details of the kind of person you want to marry, and the kind of relationship you want to have. Then meditate on scripture and pray to God to help you achieve that kind of relationship.

Key Text
Monday

This week’s reading*

*A special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles 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. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
“The indolent forfeit the invaluable experience gained by a faithful performance of the common duties of life. Not a few, but thousands of human beings exist only to consume the benefits which God in His mercy bestows upon them. . . . They forget that by trading wisely on the talents lent them they are to be producers as well as consumers. If they comprehended the work that the Lord desires them to do as His helping hand they would not shun responsibility” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 353).

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

(1 Timothy 6:10, NIV)
what do you think?

Regarding your career goals for the future, put the following considerations in the order of their importance:

1. How much the job pays
2. How prestigious the job is considered to be
3. Your parents’/friends’ opinion of what you should do
4. How much you think you would enjoy the job on a daily basis
5. Whether the job would conflict with your beliefs and standards
6. How many perks the job has (i.e., vacation time, free meals, travel, etc.)
7. How much you can help people and contribute to your community
8. What you believe God is calling you to do with your life

did you know?

The average U.S. worker will change careers three to five times in their lifetime.

John Krumboltz, a Stanford University professor, describes a phenomenon called “occupationism,” which he compares to sexism, ageism, and racism. This is where people will treat a person in a particular way based on their job title instead of how well they do their job or even what their character is like. Many people might even consider themselves failures next to others with more prestigious occupations. This particular form of discrimination oftentimes stops people from pursuing a career they would really enjoy because of the job’s reputation (news.stanford.edu/pr/91/910528Arc1355.html).

INTO THE STORY

“Nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’

“We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.”

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grieves.

“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

(2 Thessalonians 3:8-12; 1 Timothy 6:10-19, NIV)
According to Paul, how important is staying usefully busy?

We are told to “earn the bread [that you] eat.” How can you do that? Do you think that everyone has to be working at a paying job, or are there other ways to contribute in different circumstances?

How do you think that money can be a root of evil in your own life?

What kinds of financial responsibilities do we have toward each other?

According to this passage, what is wealth? How does God see wealth?

What should our priorities be for our futures?

How can we balance a good work ethic with “love of money”?

“Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:6-8, NIV).

“We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28, 29, NIV).

“We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else” (1 Thessalonians 2:6, NIV).

“Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying” (2 Corinthians 11:29-31, NIV).

“How is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying” (2 Corinthians 11:29-31, NIV).

“Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you” (1 Thessalonians 2:9, NIV).

“The darkest day in a man’s career is that wherein he fancies there is some easier way of getting a dollar than by squarely earning it.”—Horace Greeley, 19th-century newspaper editor.

“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”—Michael Jordan, American NBA basketball player.
Sabbath

In Colossians 1:28, 29 Paul describes what he is working for. Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and he worked hard at his job so that he could financially support himself and never be a burden on the church members. Regardless of his career that he was trained for, his passion was to tell others about Jesus. Paul took great pride in his hard work, but he used his career to further the gospel. Who would have thought that tent-making could be used for God? How could your career path be used for God?

Make a list of as many occupations as you can think of and next to each one write one idea of how God could use that occupation to help others or glorify Him. (Use the note pages in the back of your study guide.)

Sunday

In our Bible passages this week, we see that a good work ethic is incredibly important. We should stay productively busy and we should be contributing to our own keep. If you are not able to work while in school, there are ways to contribute other than financially until you are on your own. However, we also see that the “love of money” can cause a whole heap of problems. How can you keep the balance: working hard and making money while not loving money too much? What do you think is the right balance?

Today, make a budget of your personal expenses and your income. How can you make room for God in your monthly budget?

Monday

The Key Text says that some people, “eager for money, wandered from the faith.” In what ways can money cause you to compromise your belief? Most of us immediately think of keeping the Sabbath, but there are other ways that our beliefs can be compromised for money. Consider these options, and put the dollar amount it would take to entice you to do each one:

1. Lie to your boss about a mistake you made: $________
2. Allow your supervisor to believe that you worked longer than you did: $________
3. Write someone else’s essay for them: $________
4. Stop volunteering your time at church or a charity because work is too demanding: $________

Tuesday

As Mrs. White points out in the Flashlight section this week, we are not supposed to be simply consumers. In our society the newest gadgets, the latest fashions, the nicest cars, and the most up-to-date entertainment news are seen as signs of social success. But that is all consumption! God cares about our productivity. He created us each to contribute something unique and distinctive to the world.

Today, make a list of 25 unique things about you that many people might not know. Why did God give you these characteristics? (Use the note pages in the back of your study guide.)

Wednesday

If you look at the Punch Line verses this week, you will see that Paul’s focus was never on impressing other people around him with his excellent taste, wealth, or ability to compete. Instead, he worked hard so that he could show God to the people who had not yet met Him. In Titus 2:6-8 he encourages young people to work in such a way that other people will never be able to say anything against them.

For the following situations, make a note of how you would expect a Christian to act versus a non-Christian:

1. Someone ahead of this person in line yells at the cashier for being too slow.
   1. Someone ahead of this person in line yells at the cashier for being too slow.
2. A mistake turns out to be the right thing and this person’s boss congratulates her for her good work.

Thursday

Choosing a career is an important decision. Not only will it affect your ability to support yourself, but it will also affect your day-to-day happiness. You must choose something that you will love to do so that the 40 or more hours a week you spend at it will be a joy, not drudgery. In what ways can you witness for God in your career choice? How can you help others? How can you do God’s will? How much has God factored into your choice?

Friday

God created you to be exactly who you are. He gave you your strengths and your abilities, as well as your personality, your looks, and your preferences. God created you to do something with the time He gave you. You have a destiny, and your career is a part of that destiny that God created. Have you talked to God about what He wants you to do with your life? Have you asked the One who designed you what He designed you for?


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**flashlight**

“Paul pleaded with those who had once known in their lives the power of God, to return to their first love of gospel truth. With unanswerable arguments he set before them their privilege of becoming free men and women in Christ, through whose atoning grace all who make full surrender are clothed with the robe of His righteousness. He took the position that every soul who would be saved must have a genuine, personal experience in the things of God” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 388).

**keytext**

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

(*Galatians 5:1*, NIV)
Today the most common perception [among 16- to 29-year-olds] toward Christianity is that present-day Christianity is “anti-homosexual.” Overall, 91 percent of young non-Christians and 80 percent of young churchgoers say this phrase describes Christianity. As the research probed this perception, non-Christians and Christians explained that beyond their recognition that Christians oppose homosexuality, they believe that Christians show excessive contempt and unloving attitudes toward gays and lesbians. One of the most frequent criticisms of young Christians was that they believe the church has made homosexuality a “bigger sin” than anything else. Moreover, they claim that the church has not helped them apply the biblical teaching on homosexuality to their friendships with gays and lesbians.

“So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

“Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.

“Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life? Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. . . . You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

(Romans 1:24-32, NLT; Romans 5:1, 2, 9-11, NIV; Galatians 5:1, 13-15, NIV)
Read the passages in the Into the Story section and answer the following questions:

When Paul wrote, “So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself,” what do you think that meant in the ancient world? What might that mean today?

What was the truth about God that the people traded for a lie?

Why do people think it foolish to acknowledge God?

What are some of the “ways of sinning” that the passage describes? How have I been guilty of those things?

Is God’s justification available to all sinners? Explain.

What can I do to experience freedom in Christ?

Read the passage in Romans 5 and reflect on the assurance of your salvation.

Read the passage in Galatians 5 and reflect on the experience of your salvation.

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, NIV).

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16, NIV).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” (Romans 8:35, NIV).

“Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable” (Leviticus 18:22, NIV).

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, NIV).

“There is a tendency to think of sex as something degrading. It is not. It is magnificent, an enormous privilege. But because of that the rules are tremendously strict and severe.”—Francis DeVas, American author and journalist.

“We want to be a saint, but we also want to feel every sensation experienced by sinners; we want to be innocent and pure, but we also want to be experienced and taste all of life. . . . Small wonder that life is often a trying enterprise, and that we are often tired and pathologically overextended.”—Ronald Rolheiser, president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas.
Is that the best foundation for your belief? Explain.

Describe what you think “foolish thinking” looked like in the ancient world and what it looks like today.

How does the text above (Romans 1:28) shed light on Galatians 5:1 where Paul says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” What is the connection, if any, between foolishness and slavery?

Moreover, a study published by Elmhurst Hospital Center, Queens, N.Y., suggests that suicide, HIV infection, violent victimization, homelessness, and substance use are known to affect gay (gay males, lesbians, and bisexual persons of both genders) youths at disproportionately high rates. According to an article entitled “Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Adolescents: Providing Esteem-Enhancing Care to a Battered Population,” gay youths “experience great difficulties in this society specific to their sexual orientation. These difficulties become internalized by many gay youths, leading to high rates of preventable morbidities and mortalities.”

How do the verses in Punch Lines illuminate these findings that link an active gay lifestyle with such “great difficulties”?

How can I show unconditional acceptance to a gay friend without compromising biblical standards?


cornerstone connections

16

this week’s reading*


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flashlight

“Had he attempted to enter into argument with his opponents, they would have stubbornly refused to listen to his words; but the relation of his experience was attended with a convincing power that for the time seemed to soften and subdue their hearts” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 409).

keytext

“That he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, . . . and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. . . . Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’”

(Acts 22:13-16, NKJV)
What kinds of personal stories are most compelling and inspiring to you? Why?

Rank the following in order of their impact on you:

- from rags to riches
- from hell-bent living (sex, drugs, rock ‘n’ roll) to holy living
- from ignorance to understanding
- from pride to humility
- from being a selfish oppressor to a selfless liberator
- from being unnoticed to famous

Why does the story of such transformation intrigue you? What are some real-life examples of the above?

**did you know?**

Did you know that top business executives understand the power of our life’s story and its effect on business? According to Jim Loehr, author of *The Power of Story: Change Your Story, Change Your Destiny in Business and in Life*, stories reflect our unique interpretation of our world of experience.

“Stories make sense out of chaos; they organize our many divergent experiences into a coherent thread; they shape our entire reality. . . . We give life to something with every story we tell” (http://hpinstitute.com/book_power_of_story.html).

The apostle Paul’s story gave life to the fact of his conversion and to the power of Jesus to change a person. It was a positive story. What kinds of stories do we tell ourselves and others?

**INTO THE STORY**

“So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying,

‘Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.’ And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.

‘Then he said: ‘I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” So I answered, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.”

“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.” And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, “Brother Saul, receive your sight.” And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, “The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.””

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’” (Revelation 12:10, 11, NKJV).

“So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’” (Acts 4:18-20, NKJV).

“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27, NIV).

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, NKJV).

“The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:2, 3, NKJV).

“Courage is doing what you’re afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you’re scared.”—Eddie Rickenbacker, 20th-century American aviator.
Sabbath

Read and respond to the ranking exercise in the What Do You Think? portion of this week’s lesson. Why do you think personal testimonies have such a powerful impact on people? Consider some of the final words Peter said just before his life ended: “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, NKJV). When in your life have you witnessed something that was hard for others to believe? How do you communicate such an experience when you know others might be suspicious or may find it hard to believe? What have you witnessed about the risen Christ? We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Sunday

Read the Into the Story portion and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to guide your study. As you read and respond to the questions, what do you think is Paul’s attitude as he goes directly to Jerusalem where he knows they will arrest him?

- Resolved
- Stubborn
- Fearless
- Humbled
- Hopeful
- Defeated

Think about what mind-set he possessed that would walk him directly to Jerusalem where he knew they wanted to arrest and kill him. What qualities do you see in the apostles that you long to see in your own life? Are there people you know who have those qualities today? Who are they and how have those people encouraged you in your relationship to Christ?

Monday

The Key Text to memorize this week comes from Acts 22:13-16, in which Paul retells what God said through the faithful servant Ananias. Read this message several times and rewrite the message in your own words as you think God would say them to you. Think of the possibilities that God may have planned for your life. If you were called upon to tell your story, what would you say about Christ and your devotion to Him?

Tuesday

Read the quote from The Acts of the Apostles in the Flashlight section and think about the way personal stories break down walls and ease tension where arguments and debate only create stress. When have you experienced a hostile atmosphere settle because someone simply told their story? Think of some people you know that tend to say things that get people vigorously debating. Their approach might enable people to think and share, but if it leads to hostility, then no one is really listening to the other. You might know of others who tend to soften hard topics by telling their stories. What do you think is the advantage/disadvantage of either approach? Is there a time for both? Think of some examples in Scripture of people who caused controversy and those who communicated at ease through stories.

Wednesday

The Punch Lines in this week’s lesson echo the call to be witnesses for Christ to the world. Some are the words of apostles while other passages are the very commands Christ gave to people who came to know Him as Savior. As you read these selections from Scripture, which verse is speaking to you today? What do you think God is trying to say to you personally?

Thursday

Paul knew that going to Jerusalem meant being captured and tried by the Jewish leaders who were threatened by the growing Christian church. While Paul’s testimony subdued them some, they were still bent on his arrest, which reveals the extent of their stubborness. Are there hard things you have to do or say this week that you would much rather avoid? An unpleasant task or an awkward conversation? Perhaps it is an act of kindness or forgiveness you know you should extend to someone who needs it but to do so makes you feel afraid. In the same way Paul had to steady his courage for this task, and determine to just do the right thing no matter what might be the outcome. Pray honestly and openly for the strength and the wisdom, and follow through.

Friday

Maybe it is time to write out your conversion story. Think about Paul’s road from beginning to end as he summarized it in this week’s lesson. If you had to tell the story of your conversion to Christ what would you say? Whether you were raised as a Christian or became one later you have a story to tell. Think of the times when God has been very real to you. Consider the moments you made decisions based on what you believe about God. What are some of the adventures you hope to experience as a result of following Christ? This is your story—stick to it!


this week’s reading*


*A special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles 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. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
When the darkness is deepest, the light of a godlike character will shine the brightest. When every other trust fails, then it will be seen who have an abiding trust in Jehovah. And while the enemies of truth are on every side, watching the Lord’s servants for evil, God will watch over them for good” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 432).

“Then Paul made his defense: ‘I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.’”

(Acts 25:8, NIV)
Either/Or—Which is more frustrating or infuriating to see: (1) someone who is unmistakably guilty but gets set free on a technicality, or (2) someone who is completely innocent but gets convicted and punished for someone else’s crime? Which scenario is more unjust in your mind? Why? How should Christians respond when they are falsely accused and misrepresented? Which is more of a value to human freedom? Making sure people who are guilty are punished or ensuring that those who are innocent are not falsely condemned?

**Kangaroo Court**

“An unfair, biased, or hasty judicial proceeding that ends in a harsh punishment. . . . A proceeding and its leaders who are considered sham, corrupt, and without regard for the law.

“The concept of kangaroo court dates to the early nineteenth century. Scholars trace its origin to the historical practice of itinerant judges on the U.S. frontier. These roving judges were paid on the basis of how many trials they conducted, and in some instances their salary depended on the fines from the defendants they convicted. The term kangaroo court comes from the image of these judges hopping from place to place, guided less by concern for justice than by the desire to wrap up as many trials as the day allowed.” (Taken from West’s Encyclopedia of American Law at http://answers.com/topic/kangaroo-court.)

When Paul stood before Festus as the Jews falsely accused him, he, being a Roman citizen, could say four words that would save him from a kangaroo court:

“If appeal to Caesar.” Roman law was absolute in this matter.

“Then Paul made his defense: ‘I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.’

“Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, ‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?’

“Paul answered: ‘I am now standing before Caesar’s court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!’

“After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: ‘You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!’”

(Acts 25:1-12, NIV)
“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute” (Exodus 23:1-3, NKJV).

“The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him” (Proverbs 20:7, NIV).

“You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 16:18-20, NKJV).

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“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:5-7, NIV).

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”—Elie Wiesel, writer, professor, political activist, Nobel laureate, and Holocaust survivor.

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 20th-century American clergyman and civil rights leader.
Sabbath
Read and respond to the ranking exercise in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. Whether the guilty go free or the innocent get punished, the core principle that binds these two scenarios together is the idea of justice. In this week’s story Paul experiences the judgment of corrupt leaders as well as the justice of an honest ruler. Throughout the whole ordeal Paul stands tall as a man of character and integrity. Read Deuteronomy 17:8-13 and ask yourself: “How do I obey God’s Word when the leaders who are supposed to uphold justice are not obeying it?” How should Christian believers respond?

Monday
The Key Text to memorize this week comes from Acts 25:8. Think of some people in Scripture and in history, as well as in your own life, who have taken a stand for themselves declaring their innocence in humility.

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<th>History</th>
<th>My Life</th>
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How does their trust in God help them to be brave and at peace in times of persecution?

Tuesday
Read the quote from The Acts of the Apostles in the Flashlight section and read it expressively out loud. Try to imagine what it would be like to hear Esther, Daniel, or Joseph say these words. The woman who anointed Jesus’ body (Mark 14) easily could have said these words after that night she was mistreated. Ellen White said of John the Baptist that in his final hour he could stand tall before kings because he had bowed low before God. Determine today how you will stand when you are mistreated, falsely accused, or misunderstood. How will your character be revealed? Is there someone you know who has experienced adversity in this way that you could ask to pray for you? The time to prepare for trials is in your walk with God today.

Wednesday
The Punch Lines in this week’s lesson remind believers of God’s plan for truth, justice, and integrity. Read all the verses and then highlight or underline the phrases or words in each verse that you think are especially important. If you could live by one of these passages during the course of this week, which verse do you think would make the biggest difference in your life? Pray to encounter someone this week who may not know much about God’s idea of justice or Paul’s story with whom you might share what you have discovered.

Thursday
This week’s lesson captures one of many court scenes in the latter part of Paul’s life as an apostle. He would go on to face soldiers, lawyers, governors, and kings before his time on earth would come to an end. Before your life is over, you will encounter many people who may be influenced for or against Christ simply by the way you live as a Christian. Think about the people you know you will interact with and write down one word that describes the impression you want to leave with them. If you are going to meet a friend, maybe you want them to experience “joy,” or if it is a fellow student who is struggling alone you may want them to feel “companionship.” Perhaps there is someone you do not get along with that needs to experience “mercy.” Identify five people and write a word next to their name, praying that God will help you bless their life when you are with them.

Friday
We are told that as the world comes to an end, authorities and individuals will seek to do injustice to Christians. Some imagine and worry about what those events will be like, but knowing those things will not make you able to stand. Knowing Christ and practicing a life of devotion and loyalty to Him builds the kind of character that will be courageous in trials. Jesus said: “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say” (Luke 12:11, 12, NIV). As you reflect on the end, remind yourself about what you might do today to walk faithfully with Christ, as Paul did long ago.

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this week’s reading*

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flashlight

“Among those who gave their hearts to God through the labors of Paul in Rome was Onesimus, a pagan slave who had wronged his master, Philemon, a Christian believer in Colosse, and had escaped to Rome. In the kindness of his heart, Paul sought to relieve the poverty and distress of the wretched fugitive and then endeavored to shed the light of truth into his darkened mind. Onesimus listened to the words of life, confessed his sins, and was converted to the faith of Christ” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 456).
Think of a time when you had to borrow someone else’s clothes to wear. What did you have to wear? Did anything funny happen as a result? Were you able to find something you liked or suited your tastes? Or did you feel silly and uncomfortable because the outfits were “sooo not you”?

According to Webster’s, the definition of compassion is: “Sorrow for the sufferings or troubles of another or others accompanied by a deep urge to help.”

The Greek language was used to write the New Testament. In Colossians 3:12 the original words for compassion are splangchna oiktirmou. Splangchna means “innards” or “guts,” and oiktirmou means “compassion,” “pity,” “mercy.”

Paul wrote Colossians, and he also wrote Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 he uses the same word when referring to God as the “Father of mercies.” We can infer that Paul is saying that we are filled with a sense of compassion when we see someone is hurting, and we feel the urge to want to make things better, to help in some way. Compassion is not just an act for show. It should be a gut reaction—coming from deep inside.

“I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

“I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

“So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.”

(Philemon 1:4-21, NIV)
From the passage above, list to whom Paul is writing and whom this letter is about. Describe their characteristics as seen through Paul’s eyes.

What is Paul asking for? What assurances does he give? Show why you think he was moved so readily to give such assurances.

Imagine you were Philemon. What would your response be? Explain.

How can Paul’s example of appealing to love rather than displaying force be helpful in your interactions with others?

What do you think is the “big picture” of the passages above? In one phrase sum up the main thought of the passages above. Share with the class why you made that statement.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, NIV).

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, NIV).

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12, NIV).

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Romans 12:15, NIV).

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:1-4, NIV).

“When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when we receive advice about where to go or what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Sometimes, perhaps. But what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares.”

Sabbath
In a small group of friends share the answers you gave in the What Do You Think? section. Believe it or not, we are asked to share not only our clothes, but everything else—including our burdens. Read the following verses and discuss what they have to say about compassion.

• Acts 2:42-47
• Acts 4:32-35
• Galatians 6:2
• Colossians 3:12
• 2 Corinthians 1:3

Sunday
Think about the story of Onesimus and Philemon. Reflect on the following questions:

Paul believed that Onesimus had changed and was willing to vouch for him to Philemon. Have you ever helped someone out with a tough time in their life? Share that story with your class. How did it make you feel?

Can you have compassion for someone you don’t know? What about caring for people in another country? What would that look like?

Who do you know is going through a tough time right now? How can you help that person?

Monday
Paul did not simply order Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household. Instead, he pleaded with him to accept Onesimus on the basis of love. Was Paul feeling sorry for Onesimus or having compassion on him? What is the difference?

Tuesday
In chapter 43 of The Acts of the Apostles, Ellen White gives the background story of what happened to Onesimus. Review the chapter in The Acts of the Apostles. Onesimus was a thief, but Paul was willing to appeal to Philemon on his behalf. Why? What does this say about the following concepts?

Repentance
Forgiveness
Compassion

Wednesday
Apply the selected Punch Lines to your life by filling in the blanks:

“Carry each other’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2, NIV). What are some burdens you can carry for your friends?

“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12, NIV). What is one way you can show compassion to a total stranger?

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other” (Ephesians 4:32, NIV). This is what the command is telling me to do today:

Thursday
What is keeping me from carrying someone else’s burdens or from helping those around me? How can I change that and be more compassionate?

Friday
Ask yourself: How would the world be different today if more people had compassion for one another?


this week’s reading*

* A special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles 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. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
**flashlight**

“It could not be expected that Paul, a poor and friendless prisoner, would be able to gain the attention of the wealthy and titled classes of Roman citizens. To them vice presented all its glittering allurements and held them willing captives. But from among the toilworn, want-stricken victims of their oppression, even from among the poor slaves, many gladly listened to the words of Paul and in the faith of Christ found a hope and peace that cheered them under the hardships of their lot. Yet while the apostle’s work began with the humble and the lowly, its influence extended until it reached the very palace of the emperor” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 461).

**keytext**

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

(Colossians 3:17, NKJV)
The apostle Paul showed great faith even though he was a prisoner. Check the things in the list below that are expressions of faith:

- Praying for something that seems impossible
- Walking your dog
- Forgiving a friend
- Loving those who don’t love you
- Making your own breakfast
- Gossiping

Paul is under house arrest in Rome for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Even in his chains, he expresses great joy in his letters to some of the churches throughout the region. His joy is not dependent on external circumstances. It comes from knowing Christ and spreading the good news of salvation to others. Paul counts it a privilege to be a minister of the gospel and to be a servant to his fellow believers. Even as a prisoner he asks his Christian brothers and sisters to pray that he would have more opportunities to share his faith. He writes to the churches that he has heard good reports of their diligent work for the gospel. He admonishes them to continue in the faith, and in love and unity with one another. He reminds them that if they continue in their walk with Christ, they will have a great reward in heaven.

In the following passages, written to the Philippians, Paul wants the believers to know that his trials are for good—for the furtherance of the gospel. And he encourages them to continue the work.

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy. I am happy because you have joined me in spreading the good news. You have done so from the first day until now. I am sure that the One who began a good work in you will carry it on until it is completed. That will be on the day Christ Jesus returns.”

“Brothers and sisters, here is what I want you to know. What has happened to me has really helped to spread the good news. One thing has become clear. I am being held by chains because of my stand for Christ. All of the palace guards and everyone else know it. Because I am being held by chains, most of the believers in the Lord have become bolder. They now speak God’s word more boldly and without fear.” “I completely expect and hope that I won’t be ashamed in any way. I’m sure I will be brave enough. Now as always Christ will be lifted high through my body. He will be lifted up whether I live or die.”

(Philippians 1:3-6, 12-14, 20, NIV)
“I have learned to be content no matter what happens to me. I know what it’s like not to have what I need. I also know what it’s like to have more than I need. I have learned the secret of being content no matter what happens. I am content whether I am well fed or hungry. I am content whether I have more than enough or not enough. I can do everything by the power of Christ. He gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13, NIrV).

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven . . . if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:3, 4, 23, NKJV).

“Always be joyful because you belong to the Lord” (Philippians 4:4, NIrV).

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17, NKJV).

“Praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains” (Colossians 4:3, NKJV).

“Dear friend, while you are reading these words, He is the one who is keeping your lungs breathing and your heart beating in your chest. He loves you so much that He died rather than to see you perish. . . . Now if all this is true, nothing is more important than knowing Him and preparing yourself and others for His return! If it isn’t true, then nothing really matters.” — To See the King, Seven Steps to Salvation, by Doug Batchelor, p. 92.
Sabbath

Read the Key Text for this week’s lesson. On the lines below, write out the meaning of this verse in your own words. Give real-life examples of words and/or deeds that are reflections of Christ.

___________________________
___________________________
___________________________

Sunday

In the quote by Doug Batchelor in the Other Eyes section, he says that “nothing is more important than knowing [Christ] and preparing yourself and others for His return! If it isn’t true, then nothing really matters.” Why do you think nothing really matters if the good news about Jesus and what He has done for us is not true?

___________________________
___________________________
___________________________

Monday

Choose from the words in the box to write synonyms for the words in the list below.

Conduct _________ Witness ___________
Example _________ Message _________
Report ___________ Belief ____________

Choose three words from those listed above and describe how they are important to you as a follower of Christ.

1. ______________________________
2. ______________________________
3. ______________________________

Tuesday

Communication is a powerful tool that can be used for good or for evil. We can communicate thoughts, ideas, and beliefs verbally and nonverbally. Nonverbal communication comes in many forms such as: written, music, art, dance, behaviors, jesters, facial expressions, etc.

Wednesday

Joseph always conducted himself as a child of God, even in the face of adversity. He never retaliated or sought revenge on those who had done him wrong. Potiphar was so impressed with the way Joseph carried himself that he put Joseph, who was a slave, in charge of his whole household. When Joseph was falsely accused and thrown into prison, even the warden noticed Joseph’s good behavior and trusted him to be over all of the other prisoners. Joseph’s good reputation paid off in the end and he was made ruler of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. (Read Joseph’s story in Genesis 39:1-23; 41:37-40.)

How did their example affect your life? What have you done differently as a result of their example?

___________________________
___________________________
___________________________
___________________________
___________________________

Thursday

Complete the following sentences.

1. And the Lord will deliver me from every ___________ ___________ and __________ me for His heavenly kingdom. (2 Timothy 4:18, NKJV)
2. For God has not given us a __________ of __________, but of power and __________ of love and of a __________. (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV)
3. There is laid up for me the __________

Friday

When Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he was hearing good reports of the Christian believers in the nearby cities and towns, reports of the good work they were doing to spread the gospel of Jesus, and of their loving interactions with one another. In turn he gave them a good report of his experiences in Rome. As a prisoner he was still rejoicing in the Lord and witnessing to the guards and those in Caesar’s household. Paul’s story is an example to us of how vital our Christian conduct is in witnessing and spreading the love of Christ. Many hearts can be won to Christ just by watching the good example of someone else. Can you name someone in your own life who has been a witness or a good example to you?

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this week’s reading*


* A special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles 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. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
"The desire for love and sympathy is implanted in the heart by God Himself. Christ, in His hour of agony in Gethsemane, longed for the sympathy of His disciples. And Paul, though apparently indifferent to hardship and suffering, yearned for sympathy and companionship. The visit of Onesiphorus, testifying to his fidelity at a time of loneliness and desertion, brought gladness and cheer to one who had spent his life in service for others" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 491).
what do you think?

According to various scientific researches, people who are actively involved in church tend to experience improved health and longevity. Why do you think that is? Do a bit of reading up, and make a list of the top three possible reasons why being part of church community would lead to better health. Share your answers with your class.

INTO THE STORY

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.

“So never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord. And don’t be ashamed of me, either, even though I’m in prison for him. With the strength God gives you, be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Good News. For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus. And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News. And God chose me to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of this Good News.

“That is why I am suffering here in prison. But I am not ashamed of it, for I know the one in whom I trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until the day of his return.

“Hold on to the pattern of wholesome teaching you learned from me—a pattern shaped by the faith and love that you have in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you.”

“You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygellus and Hermogenes.

“May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! . . .”

“Timothy, please come as soon as you can. Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry.”

“But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear. And he rescued me from certain death. Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila and those living in the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed at Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter.”

(2 Timothy 1:7-14, NLT; 1:15-18, NIV; 4:9-11, NLT; 2 Timothy 4:17-21, NLT)
List the people mentioned in these passages. What does Paul say they have done or are to do? What actions helped Paul and what hurt him?

In 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul lists three characteristics of a Holy Spirit-filled life. In your own words, write them down. Now read Galatians 5:22, 23 and add to the list. How does this list supplement Romans 12:4, 5?

These passages speak of “wholesome teaching” that Paul taught. What are some examples of wholesome teaching that you’ve learned?

Paul writes: “But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear” (2 Timothy 4:17, NLT). Paul was lonely and nearing the end of his life, but he never forgot his life’s goal: to help other people. What is your goal?

“Being included in God’s family is the highest honor and the greatest privilege you will ever receive. Nothing else comes close. Whenever you feel unimportant, unloved, or insecure, remember to whom you belong.” —Rick Warren, *Purpose Driven Life*, p. 121.

“One can acquire everything in solitude except character.” —Marie Henri Beyle, 19th-century French biographer and writer.
Sunday

Hebrews 3:13 and Romans 12:5 remind us that as a family of God, we have a responsibility to take care of one another, to be involved in one another’s lives.

What does the level of your involvement in your church reveal about your commitment to God’s family?

How can the following character traits help me to have authentic relationships?

Power

Love

Self-discipline

Monday

The Key Text to memorize this week contains the words of Paul urging Timothy to come (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). When you’re apart from your friends and family, loneliness can set in.

Can you think of someone that you need to call? Is there someone you can write a letter of appreciation to? Is there somebody whom you can help to relieve of their loneliness?

Tuesday

Read the quote from the Flashlight section of this week’s lesson. In times of trouble and difficulties, our faith in God can sometimes falter. During those times, we need a trusted group of people who will have faith in God on our behalf and use that faith to pull us through those tough times.

What is one step your class or small group can take this week to fulfill Galatians 6:2?

Wednesday

As you read the passages listed in the Punch Lines section of this week’s lesson, which verse strikes you as particularly significant today? Why do you think this verse is especially relevant to you today?

Thursday

Because we are imperfect and have our own idiosyncrasies, it is not uncommon to experience conflict with others from time to time. Read Romans 12:18 and 2 Corinthians 5:18. Is there someone you need to heal a broken relationship with today? If so, how can I begin that healing process?

Friday

There are many reasons to be disillusioned with the family of God: hypocrisy, legalism, pettiness, and many other reasons. It is only natural that we encounter bad behavior, because we are all sinners.

What are you doing, on a personal level, to protect the unity of the church and nurture an environment of Colossians 3:14?

this week’s reading*

The Acts of the Apostles, chapters 46, 47.

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“Among the Greeks and Romans it was customary to allow an accused person the privilege of employing an advocate to plead in his behalf before courts of justice. By force of argument, by impassioned eloquence, or by entreaties, prayers, and tears, such an advocate often secured a decision in favor of the prisoner or, failing in this, succeeded in mitigating the severity of the sentence. But when Paul was summoned before Nero, no man ventured to act as his counsel or advocate; . . . Among the Christians at Rome there was not one who came forward to stand by him in that trying hour” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 492).
The apostle Paul faced great persecution for preaching about salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. Can you name two other individuals in the Bible who faced persecution because of their faith and/or obedience to God? Give a brief description of each person’s experience.

1. ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

2. ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

INTO THE STORY

“So don’t be ashamed to give witness about our Lord. And don’t be ashamed of me, his prisoner. Instead, join with me as I suffer for the good news. God’s power will help us do that. God has saved us. He has chosen us to live a holy life. It wasn’t because of anything we have done. It was because of his own purpose and grace. Through Christ Jesus, God gave us that grace even before time began. It has now been made known through the coming of our Savior, Christ Jesus. He has destroyed death. Because of the good news, he has brought life out into the light. That life never dies. I was appointed to announce the good news. I was appointed to be an apostle and a teacher. That’s why I’m suffering the way I am. But I’m not ashamed. I know the One I have believed in. I am sure he is able to take care of what I have given him. I can trust him with it until the day he returns as judge.”

“The apostle Paul faced great persecution for preaching about salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. Can you name two other individuals in the Bible who faced persecution because of their faith and/or obedience to God? Give a brief description of each person’s experience.

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(2 Timothy 1:8-12; 3:1-5; 4:1, 2, 7, 8, NIV)

Cornerstone Connections

38

In the U.S. system of government . . . Federal law authorizes capital punishment for more than 40 offenses, including premeditated murder, treason, and murder related to aircraft hijacking, drug trafficking, and civil rights violations. The majority of states also authorize the death penalty for violations of state criminal law, including such crimes as treason, murder, and rape. Methods for executing offenders vary among the states. The majority of states that have the death penalty execute offenders by means of lethal injection—the administration of fatal amounts of fast-acting drugs and chemicals. Other common methods include lethal gas and electrocution.” (Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2003. © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Many women and men of God were treated as common criminals and were put to death for preaching the gospel of Christ. Read Revelation 20:4 to find out what their end will be.

“There will be terrible times in the last days. People will love themselves. They will love money. They will brag and be proud. They will tear others down. They will not obey their parents. They won’t be thankful or holy. They won’t love others. They won’t forgive others. They will tell lies about people. They will be out of control. They will be wild. They will hate what is good. They will turn against their friends. They will act without thinking. They will think they are better than others. They will love what pleases them instead of loving God. They will act as if they were serving God. But what they do will show that they have turned their backs on God’s power. Have nothing to do with those people.”

“I give you a command in the sight of God and Christ Jesus. Christ will judge the living and the dead. Because he and his kingdom are coming, here is the command I give you. Preach the word. Be ready to serve God in good times and bad. Correct people’s mistakes. Warn them. Cheer them up with words of hope. Be very patient as you do these things. Teach them carefully.”

“I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is a crown waiting for me. It is given to those who are right with God. The Lord, who judges fairly, will give it to me on the day he returns. He will not give it only to me. He will also give it to all those who are longing for him to return.”

(2 Timothy 1:8-12; 3:1-5; 4:1, 2, 7, 8, NIV)
punch lines

“Give praise to the One who is able to keep you from falling into sin. He will bring you into his heavenly glory without any fault. He will bring you there with great joy” (Jude 24, NIrV).

“God is the God who gives peace. May he make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept free from blame. May you be without blame from now until our Lord Jesus Christ comes. The one who has chosen you is faithful. He will do all these things” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, NIrV).

“You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living in him. Have your roots in him. Build yourselves up in him. Grow strong in what you believe, just as you were taught. Be more thankful than ever before” (Colossians 2:6, 7, NIrV).

“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Give thanks no matter what happens. God wants you to thank him because you believe in Christ Jesus. Don’t put out the Holy Spirit’s fire” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19, NIrV).

“Do your best to please God. Be a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed. Teach the message of truth correctly” (2 Timothy 2:15, NIrV).

“How many of us could tell everyone we know that no matter what they do to us or against us, we forgive them? God does that for you.” — The Prayer That Changes Everything, by Stormie Omartian.

“The kisses of this world are like the kisses of Judas. They are kisses of betrayal and of death. But the kisses of our Lord Jesus Christ are kisses of grace, friendship, kindness, and love.” — This Is Love, by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Ph.D.
Write out the meaning to this week’s Key Text in your own words.

**Tuesday**
Paul had to stand before Nero’s court to defend his position. He was accused of blasphemy and heresy. Many of the Jews did not accept the teaching that Jesus was the Son of God. They considered this to be blasphemous. They also thought Paul was going against the traditional teachings and laws of the Jews. Paul was innocent of these charges. One day Jesus will come to judge the world, and women should have access to the Bible so that they could read and learn of the truth for themselves instead of simply accepting the interpretation of educated scholars and pontiffs, who would often teach false doctrine.

“How Wycliffe was still at college, he entered upon the study of the Scriptures. In those early times, when the Bible existed only in the ancient languages, scholars were enabled to find their way to the fountain of truth, which was closed to the uneducated classes. Thus already the way had been prepared for Wycliffe’s future work as a Reformer. . . .

“When Wycliffe’s attention was directed to the Scriptures, he entered upon their investigation with the same thoroughness which had enabled him to master the learning of the schools. . . .

“Here he saw the plan of salvation revealed and Christ set forth as the only advocate for man. He gave himself to the service of Christ and determined to proclaim the truths he had discovered.

“Like after Reformers, Wycliffe did not, at the opening of his work, foresee whither it would lead him. He did not set himself deliberately in opposition to Rome. But devotion to truth could not but bring him in conflict with falsehood. The more clearly he discerned the errors of the papacy, the more earnestly he presented the teaching of the Bible. He saw that Rome had forsaken the Word of God for human tradition; he fearlessly accused the priesthood of having banished the Scriptures, and demanded that the Bible be restored to the people and that its authority be again established in the church. . . . Many of the people had become dissatisfied with their former faith as they saw the iniquity that prevailed in the Roman Church, and they hailed with unconcealed joy the truths brought to view by Wycliffe; but the papal leaders were filled with rage when they perceived that this Reformer was gaining an influence greater than their own” (The Great Controversy, pp. 80, 81).

---

Choose from the words in the box below to write synonyms for the words in the list below.

- Prisoner
- Mistreatment
- Embarrassed
- Judgment
- Convinc
- Defender
- Persuade
- Ashamed
- Sentence
- Persecution
- Advocate

**Wednesday**
Can you think of any Bible characters in the Old Testament whose life was threatened or who were killed for doing the right thing? (Read the following texts for a few examples; Esther 3:1-9; Genesis 4:1-8; 1 Kings 19:1-3.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“And the Lord will deliver me from every _________ me for His heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18, NKJV).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete the following sentence:</td>
<td>“The apostle Paul was a great warrior for Christ. For many years to follow, men and women of God would arise to proclaim the truths found in the Word of God. And many would be persecuted for their faith. In the book The Great Controversy Ellen White writes of some of these men of God who suffered great trials for their stand for right and for proclaiming the truth. Contemplate the following account of John Wycliffe. He believed that ordinary men and women should have access to the Bible so that they could read and learn of the truth for themselves instead of simply accepting the interpretation of educated scholars and pontiffs, who would often teach false doctrine.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Sabbath**
Write out the meaning to this week’s Key Text in your own words.

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**Sunday**
Second Timothy 2:15 says: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (KJV). What does the expression “rightly dividing the word of truth” mean? (If possible, read this verse in different translations of the Bible.)

**Monday**
Choose from the words in the box below to write synonyms for the words in the list below.

- Prisoner
- Mistreatment
- Embarrassed
- Judgment
- Convinc
- Defender
- Persuade
- Ashamed
- Sentence
- Persecution
- Advocate

---

**the week’s reading**

*The Acts of the Apostles, chapters 48, 49*

*A special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles 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. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.*
In the life of the disciple John true sanctification is exemplified. During the years of his close association with Christ, he was often warned and cautioned by the Saviour; and these reproofs he accepted. As the character of the Divine One was manifested to him, John saw his own deficiencies, and was humbled by the revelation. Day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus, and heard His lessons of humility and patience. Day by day his heart was drawn out to Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master. (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 557.)
Write T (True) or F (False) by the statements below with which you agree or disagree.

- ___ Love is as important to your mind and body as oxygen.
- ___ True love happens when someone “sweeps you off your feet.”
- ___ Most people learn about the true meaning of love from reading the Bible.
- ___ Love is a Person.
- ___ Love and truth are two separate things.
- ___ It is possible to love God and the world at the same time.
- ___ Love is a feeling.
- ___ True love changes you.

God Is Light

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

God Is Love, so We Must Love

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

“We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

God Is Truth

“Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.”

(1 John 1:5-10; 4:7-16; 2 John 7-11, NIV)
**OUT OF THE STORY**

Circle the parts of the Scripture story that are new to you, the concepts you've never heard before.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

*Place a check mark* by what you think is the most important point in each section of the Scripture story.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think John begins his letter by describing God as “light”? Why does he state that there is no darkness in God?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What points does John make about sin?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

According to John, how do we show that we love God? How does God show His love for us?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Why is it important that people who profess to believe in God “continue” in the truth?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**punch lines**

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6, NIV).

“Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (Jude 21, NIV).

“Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11, NIV).

“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” (John 1:14, NIV).

“I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock” (Acts 20:29, NIV).

“A man without ambition is dead. A man with ambition but no love is dead. A man with ambition and love for his blessings here on earth is ever so alive. Having been alive, it won’t be so hard in the end to lie down and rest.” —Pearl Bailey, 20th-century singer.

“The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage our attention is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God.” —Charles H. Spurgeon, 19th-century English preacher.
Sabbath
Take a moment to complete the What Do You Think? activity. Discuss your answers with the class once everyone finishes. Love is one of the most misunderstood concepts in our world. We know it when we see it, but how do we learn to love? Well, John more than any other disciple, tried to make clear the true meaning of love and its power to transform us.

Read 1 John 4:16. According to John, is love someone or something?

Based on John’s conclusion about the source of love, can one achieve true love without a relationship with God? Explain your answer.

What special power does God’s love possess? (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Sunday
Read the Into the Story section of this week’s lesson, and answer the Out of the Story questions. Earlier in chapter 1 of John’s first letter, he declares that God is “light.” Light allows us to see things. It dispels and repels physical and spiritual darkness.

Read Luke 9:49. What “darkness” do you see in John’s character?

This week’s Scripture story was written by John after he had spent much time with Jesus, after the Holy Spirit had helped him overcome much of the darkness in his character. What dark areas of your life need God’s light?

Monday
This week’s Key Text contains one of the most powerful truths in all of Scripture.

Think for a moment. What things might block us from experiencing the joy of being saved, from knowing that we are now God’s children?

Read Isaiah 59:2. Sin breaks our intimacy with God. We feel far away from God. Does God abandon us (1 John 1:9)? While God still loves us, what danger is there in continuing to commit known sin (1 Timothy 4:1, 2)?

Tuesday
This week’s Flashlight quotation is one of the best descriptions of how a close love relationship with Jesus Christ transforms a person. John loved Jesus. He wasn’t perfect when he followed Jesus, but each day spent in Jesus’ presence slowly transformed John.

Read 1 John 1:1-4 to get a picture of how John describes the Jesus whom He shared with others. Write down the descriptive words that John uses to prove that he knew Jesus.

John physically walked, talked, and lived with Jesus. Since Jesus isn’t here physically, how can we get to “know” Him the way that John did? Read John 16:12-15.

Wednesday
Which of the Punch Lines speak to you, catch your attention?

During John’s time, some false teachers claimed that Jesus was not the Son of God. They taught that since all matter was evil—the human body included—God would never permit His perfect sinless nature to be mixed with sinful human flesh.

Why do you think this doctrine was dangerous?

What happens to humanity if Jesus’ sinless life, death, and resurrection are wiped away?

What did John call people who dismiss Jesus’ existence and sacrifice for sin (1 John 2:22, 23)? Are those people still around today? Explain.

Thursday
Read 1 John 3:13-18. According to John, how do we know that we have crossed over from death to sin to being alive in Christ?

List one way that you can show each of the people below that you love them.

1. Your parents: __________________
2. A senior citizen at your church: ________
3. Someone at your school who gets picked on a lot: __________________

Friday
John the Beloved wrote this about knowing God: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3, NIV).

Take a moment to reflect on these two questions: Do you know God? Does God know you?

___________________________

___________________________


this week’s reading*

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flashlight

“The rulers of the Jews were filled with bitter hatred against John for his unwavering fidelity to the cause of Christ. They declared that their efforts against the Christians would avail nothing so long as John’s testimony kept ringing in the ears of the people. In order that the miracles and teachings of Jesus might be forgotten, the voice of the bold witness must be silenced. John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Here before the authorities the apostle’s doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. By these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple’s death” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 569).

keytext

“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

(Revelation 1:9, NIV)
Rank the following items on a scale of 1 (highly upsetting) to 10 (no sweat) based on how much they annoy you.

- Losing keys: 8
- Your sibling eats all the food and leaves you none: 9
- Getting spanked by your parents: 6
- Cell phone dies: 7
- A “D” on a final exam: 3
- A paper cut: 5
- iPod gets stolen: 2
- A friend tells lies about you: 1
- Fender-bender accident: 4
- Internet access goes down for three days: 10

id you know that the island of Patmos, the place where the apostle John received the vision found in the book of Revelation, still exists today? The island of Patmos is located in the Aegean Sea and has about 3,000 inhabitants. Today it is a tourist destination for people seeking a getaway far off the beaten path. However, during the time of John, Patmos was a penal colony where prisoners worked harvesting rocks out of ancient quarries on the island. It was backbreaking work meant to humble the toughest criminals.

**The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.**

“John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’

“John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.’”

(Revelation 1:1-11, NIV)
"But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9, 10, NIV).

“All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God” (John 16:1, 2, NIV).

“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region” (Acts 13:49, 50, NIV).

“A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all” (Psalm 34:19, NIV).

“The Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous” (Psalm 146:8, NIV).

“If you will call your troubles experiences, and remember that every experience develops some latent force within you, you will grow vigorous and happy, however adverse your circumstances may seem to be.”—John Heywood, 16th-century English playwright and poet.


“Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.”—Anonymous.
Sabbath
Did you complete the What Do You Think? activity? Do any of the scenarios listed get you really upset? How do you handle the irritations you face from day to day?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17. How does the apostle Paul refer to the challenges that he and his fellow witnesses faced?

Now read 2 Corinthians 11:25-28 to get a picture of the “light” afflictions of which Paul spoke. People tend not to undergo such punishment willingly. Why did Paul do it?

How do you think Paul’s faithful witness affected John during his time of persecution? Is there someone from whom you draw strength in times of crisis?

Scan the Scripture story and make a list of all the different things that John writes about Jesus Christ and God. Share some of them.

Did you notice that John’s troubles have been forgotten as he looks upon God and the vision?

What does this teach you about how to respond to trials and adversity?

Did you complete the What Do You Think? activity? Do any of the scenarios listed get you really upset? How do you handle the irritations you face from day to day?

Sunday
Read the Into the Story section of this week’s lesson, and answer the Out of the Story questions. You were asked to consider the tone of John’s writing, given that he is enduring hard labor in a colony of prisoners on the island of Patmos.

Scan the Scripture story and make a list of all the different things that John writes about Jesus Christ and God. Share some of them.

What’s your biggest trial right now? Do you trust God to handle it? Will you wait on Him?

Tuesday
Read this week’s Flashlight quotation from Ellen G. White. John was brought before the emperor Domitian on false charges. He had done nothing wrong, yet the false testimony of evil men was going to doom him.

What counsel did Jesus give when dealing with people who wrongly accuse us (Luke 6:22)?

How should we respond to people who seek to do us harm (Luke 6:27-36)?

Is this realistic advice? In your own words, explain how you can be a person of peace, yet not be a doormat for bullies at your school.

Wednesday
Check out this week’s Punch Lines, all of which relate to the challenges of enduring trials and adversity. Consider John 16:1, 2. Jesus told the disciples that some people will harm you and claim that they are serving God in the process.

People do all kinds of things in the name of God. What would you say to a Christian who believes that abortion is murder, and therefore the killing of doctors who perform abortions is justified?

Thursday
Most of us will never be called to make the sacrifices that the apostle John made for his faith. But, at some point, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12, NKJV).

Based on your current walk with God, complete the following statement:

If I ever had to explain why I believe in Jesus Christ before my friends at school or in my neighborhood, I would say:

Friday
Read Romans 8:28-39. Choose one verse to paraphrase in your own words and write it here:

Ask God to make the assurance found in your verse real to you today.


this week’s reading*

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forever faithful

flashlight

“Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing promised to those who ‘hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.’” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 584, 585).

keytext

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”

(Revelation 1:3, NIV)
Either/Or

- I believe God blesses people today with the gift of prophecy in the same way that He blessed John with the gift of prophecy when he wrote Revelation. OR I believe John had a unique gift of prophecy and no one has been blessed in the same way since.
- The book of Revelation is primarily about Jesus. OR The book of Revelation is primarily about prophecy.
- The message delivered to the seven churches of Asia in the book of Revelation was more positive than negative. OR The message delivered to the seven churches of Asia in the book of Revelation was more negative than positive.
- According to Revelation, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church. OR According to Revelation, the remnant church is comprised of Christ’s followers—regardless of denomination.

most scholars agree that the seven churches of Asia to whom John wrote Revelation were being persecuted by Emperor Domitian (A.D. 90-95). From Wikipedia.com:

“As emperor, Domitian strengthened the economy by revaluing the Roman coinage, expanded the border defenses of the Empire, and initiated a massive building program to restore the damaged city of Rome... Domitian’s government exhibited totalitarian characteristics. As emperor, he saw himself as the new Augustus, an enlightened despot destined to guide the Roman Empire into a new era of Flavian renaissance. Religious, military, and cultural propaganda fostered a cult of personality, and by nominating himself perpetual censor, he sought to control public and private morals.”

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near..."

"Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’

"A second angel followed and said, ‘ Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’

"A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’ This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

"At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus."
Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

(Revelation 1:1-3, 8-10; 12:17; 14:6-12; 19:10, NIV)

**punch lines**

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1, 2, NIV).

“Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved” (Romans 9:27, NIV).

“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (Romans 11:5, NIV).

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14, NIV).

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7, NIV).

“We must not mind insulting men, if by respecting them we offend God.”—St. John Chrysostom, 3rd-century Archbishop of Constantinople.

“The church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life’s different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship, but to keep her on course.”—Boniface, Christian missionary in the Frankish Empire during the 8th century.

“Jesus is the one who never changes in a universe that always does. Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Friend, God’s Son, and God Himself!”—from the Seventh-day Adventist Web site (www.adventist.org/beliefs/index.html).

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the passages in the Into the Story section and then reflect on this statement by Pastor Morris Venden:

“[There is] one unique doctrine of [the Seventh-day Adventist] church. There are other people who believe the Sabbath truth and have held on to that truth for years. There are others who believe the same way we do on the condition of man in death. There are others who accept the gift of prophecy, and there are many, many people, of almost every denomination, who believe in the second coming of Christ. Our only unique contribution to the religious world has been the three angels’ messages and the connection they made for us with the sanctuary and judgment teaching.”

Questions to consider:

• What is at the heart of the three angels’ messages?

• How does your local church do at proclaiming the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14?

• How do these messages affect how we live?

• What would my life look like if I were to apply these messages to my life?
Sabbath
Review the What Do You Think? section. Notice how the Either/Or statements are based on major themes from the book of Revelation. Next to each of these themes listed below, write a few words that summarize what you believe the book of Revelation teaches on each theme.

Gift of prophecy __________________________
Jesus __________________________
Church __________________________
Remnant and its mission __________________________

Sunday
Bring Scripture alive by writing your own translation. First, fill in the blanks:
1. A frightening animal
2. Something that smells bad
3. A scary person or monster
4. Your favorite color
5. A weird-shaped object
6. The loudest thing you know of
7. Another word for “angry”
8. One more word for “angry”
9. Your church
10. Another word for “ugly”
11. Another word for Satan

Now read the passage, inserting your answers where indicated.

“Once there was a dragon that was scarier than any (1). Its breath smelled like (2) and it had eyes like (3). Its head was covered with (4) hair and shaped like a (5). Its voice was louder than a (6).

This dragon was (7). I mean really, really ticked-off (8) at a woman. The woman represents (9). This (10) dragon, of course, represents (11).

(11) went off to make war against (9)—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17, MLT [Mad Lib Translation]).

Monday
Read the Key Text then explain the difference between reading the words of prophecy, hearing the words, and taking the words to heart.
Reading: __________________________
Hearing: __________________________
Taking to heart: __________________________

Tuesday
Have you ever been intimidated by the book of Revelation? Why or why not?

What do you think Ellen White means when she says it is possible to experience a “fore-taste of heavenly things”?

What blessings would you like most from your study of Revelation?

Wednesday
After each text in the Punch Lines section, write what you think it has to say about the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission:
Romans 11:5
Romans 9:27
Matthew 24:14
1 John 1:7
1 Corinthians 13:1, 2

Thursday
What difference does it make to me today whether or not I am part of God’s remnant people? Did it make a difference in Noah’s day?

How does the belief that you belong to God’s remnant affect your spending habits? hobbies? choice of entertainment? friendships with non-believers? understanding of God?

Friday
Should God’s remnant followers today:
• Stick to ourselves—and stay out of the world?
• Get in the world and live like the world?
• Maintain the purity of the remnant while interacting with others in the world in a quest to keep learning more about God and His remnant?

Consider Dr. Jack Provonsha’s parable. “There once were three peas who lived in a pod. They looked at each other and at the walls of their pod and decided that the whole world was green. Summer slipped away, fall came, and the pod split wide open. To their dismay, the peas discovered that not only was the whole world not green, but that most of it was varying shades of brown. There were even some other shades of green. In panic, one pea took hold of the edges of the pods and tried to pull them back together again so that its world could be all green again. A second pea slipped out of the pod and became just as brown as it could as fast as it could so that no one would notice. The third pea looked at the walls of the pod and at the brown and green world outside and decided that its particular shade of green was precisely what the world out there needed.”


As quoted at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domitian.

this week’s reading*

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“Christ has given to the church a sacred charge. Every member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that the Saviour desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour’s love. All heaven is waiting for men and women through whom God can reveal the power of Christianity” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 600).

**Scripture Story:** Matthew 16:18; Revelation 7:9-17; Ephesians 2:19-22.

**Commentary:** The Acts of the Apostles, chapter 58.
Write down every adjective that first comes to mind when you hear the word “evangelist”:

Write down every evangelist that comes to mind:

List the positive and negative traits that are often associated with the stereotypical evangelist:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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**The church is not a building.**

It is not a worship service. The church is not a foundation with bricks. The church is a force tasked with the calling to shine light in a dark world. Simply put, the church is you and I. When we are serving, loving, giving, encouraging, helping others, and shining light—then we are the church! This means we are the only evangelists that Jesus has for His church.

In the first few centuries people understood Christ’s vision for the church. Onlookers were amazed by the radical grace that Christians showed toward all people—the sick, the poor, the marginalized. Thus, this radical group of believers had no name. They were simply called ecclesia—which does not mean “building” or “worship service” or “steeples.” It means “assembly,” because that is the church—it’s an assembly of ordinary folk committed to shining the light of Jesus wherever they go.

**Into the Story**

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever, Amen!’

“Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?’

“I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’

“And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

(Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 7:9-17, NIV)
punch lines

“You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16, Message).

“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6, NKJV).

“Oh, give thanks to the Lord! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples” (1 Chronicles 16:8, NKJV).

“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5, NKJV).

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NKJV).

“Find out how much God has given you and take from it what you need; the remainder is needed by others.” —Augustine of Hippo, 4th-5th-century church leader.

“When I fancied that I stood alone, I was really in the ridiculous position of being backed up by all of Christendom.” —G. K. Chesterton, early 20th-century English author.
**Sabbath**

Review your ideas about evangelists in the *What Do You Think?* section. Who came to mind? Did you think of a Bible-thumping man in a white suit who preaches with a southern accent? Or did you think of a mild-mannered statesman like Billy Graham or Ken Cox? Perhaps you envisioned a fire-faced street preacher with an accept-Jesus-right-now-or-I’ll-beat-ya-black-n-blue attitude.

Or was the first evangelist that came to mind . . . you? Probably not; yet the Bible calls all of us to be evangelists.

Before you panic, take heart. Jesus never asked you to be anyone other than yourself. To discover your unique witnessing style, answer the following questions. Then look for opportunities this week to witness in your own saddle.

**Sunday**

Take the following quiz to determine your evangelistic style.

1. You’re on the bus when a woman next to you starts asking about your church. Which approach are you most likely to take?
   a. Share a number of Bible texts to substantiate your beliefs.
   b. Invite the person to an evangelistic series that your home church is hosting.
   c. Confront the woman with truth and don’t worry whether or not she is offended.
   d. Skim over the details of what you believe; then offer to carry her heavy bags as you both get off the bus.
   e. Tell her how you became a Christian.

2. Your dad has never been a believer. What do you think the best approach would be to interest him in spiritual matters?
   a. Appeal to his intellect.
   b. Invite him to church.
   c. Explain to him the sobering truth about heaven and hell, and ask him to make a decision.
   d. Introduce him to Jesus by the way you live.
   e. Share your personal testimony with him.

3. If you were teaching a class on how to be a contagious Christian, which approach would you emphasize?
   a. Knowing the proof texts to defend your beliefs.
   b. Building relationships with unbelievers so you feel comfortable inviting friends to an evangelistic series.
   c. Speaking the truth with conviction whenever the opportunity arises.
   d. Volunteering to serve the poor so that people see an evangelistic sermon in you.
   e. Knowing your own testimony so you can share it every chance you get.

**Grading:** If you had mostly A’s: You prefer “the intellectual style.” You appeal to a person’s reason. An example of this style is Paul (see Acts 17:17).

If you had mostly B’s: You prefer “the invitational style.” You invite others to hear an evangelistic preach. An example of this style is the woman at the well (see John 4:28-30, 39).

If you had mostly C’s: You prefer “the confrontational style.” You like to command people to listen as you tell them like it is. An example of this style is Peter (see Acts 2:14).

If you had mostly D’s: You prefer “the service style.” You serve the poor and let people notice your witness. An example of this style is Dorcas (see Acts 9:36).

If you had mostly E’s: You prefer “the testimonial style.” You simply tell others what Jesus has done for you. An example of this style is the demon-possessed man (see Mark 5:18, 19).

**Monday**

Review the Key Text and then consider this commentary on the passage from the *Life Application Bible*:

A church building is sometimes called God’s house. In reality, God’s household is not a building, but a group of people. He lives in us and shows Himself to a watching world through us.

**Tuesday**

Compare and contrast Ellen White’s statement in the Flashlight section with this quotation:

“It is not merely the duty of the minister, but of every member of the church, to represent Christ to the world. They are to catch the rays of light from Jesus, and reflect them upon souls blinded by error and infatuated with false doctrines” (Ellen White, *Pastoral Ministry* [1995], p. 153).

**Wednesday**

Read the Punch Lines for this week and circle the one that speaks most directly to you. Why is that text most meaningful to you right now?

**Thursday**

Read chapter 58 in *The Acts of the Apostles* and pray that God will show you how to continue to build on the rich heritage of church leaders that have gone before you.

**Friday**

Pray over this question: “God, how can I be the light of the world today?”


**this week’s reading**


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