a word about what’s ahead...

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. To access this book in an e-format, go to www.cornerstoneconnections.net.
**July**

6—No Man Is an Island [p. 5]
Personal tragedy is no respecter of persons. Whether you are a woman with health issues or a revered religious leader with a dying daughter, God can give comfort and healing—if we are willing to go to Him.

13—Can I Get a Witness? [p. 9]
The thought of witnessing to our faith in God can often make us feel anxious and intimidated: What do I say? However, our witness can be merely one story away.

20—Days of Their Lives [p. 13]
Are you feeling physically weary and spiritually empty? As we follow Jesus’ example of rest, we have the prescription for living stress-free in a stressed-out world!

27—Misunderstood [p. 17]
Jesus’ followers didn’t always understand what He was trying to teach them. When we try to understand Jesus through the prism of selfish drives and ambitions, we can misunderstand Him, too. How can we accept Jesus for who He really is?

**August**

3—Pagan Faith [p. 21]
Is it even possible for someone who doesn’t believe in God to have faith? The Phoenician woman is a perfect example of faith against all odds.

10—Move That Mountain [p. 25]
In spite of having face-to-face time with Jesus, the disciples still struggled with faith. But when they caught a glimpse of Jesus, the craziness of their lives became calm, and they were able to accomplish what seemed impossible.

17—Who Is Jesus? [p. 29]
Jesus was popular and well-liked by ordinary people. But He wasn’t the Messiah the religious leaders were expecting. What kind of Savior do we expect? Who do we say that He is?

24—A Tale of Two Seekers [p. 33]
A seeker of eternal life leaves Jesus’ presence sad because he discovers that what he loves most is not what he is seeking. But our story doesn’t have to end that way!

31—Rejuveniling Your Faith [p. 37]
When parents brought their children to Jesus for a prayer of blessing, His disciples tried to turn them away. But Jesus loved hanging out with children. Actually, He wants us all to learn lessons about faith from these young disciples.

**September**

7—Wake Up! [p. 41]
As Jesus was standing at the graveside of His friend Lazarus, Scripture tells us that He wept. Why? Was He sad? Did He miss His friend? Or was it more than that?

14—Out on a Limb for Jesus [p. 45]
Zacchaeus climbed a tree in order to see Jesus. But it takes more than merely seeing Jesus to be transformed. It was by being in Jesus’ presence that Zacchaeus was changed.

21—The Alabaster Disaster [p. 49]
For Simon, having Mary pour perfume on Jesus’ feet was scandalous. For those of us who, like Mary, feel the need for forgiveness, it represents an act of lavish love and grace.

28—Two Against One [p. 53]
In the great controversy between right and wrong, humility is locked up in a desperate battle against selfish ambition and pride. Does humility have a chance?

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

*Insight* has stories of people today from which you can learn practical ideas for reality living.
Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. . . . Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christlike life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls” (The Desire of Ages, p. 347).

“When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, ’If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.’ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.”

(Mark 5:27-29, NIV)
Every person is unique and different. Write down four things that make you uniquely "you."

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

How are you different from every other person? Do you feel that these differences make you special? Do you feel that they cause you to be misunderstood? Do you enjoy being different, or do you wish you were like everyone else and "fit in"?

God planned where you’d be born and where you’d live for His purpose. Your race and nationality are no accident. God left no detail to chance. He planned it all for His purpose. The Bible says, ‘From one man he made every nation, . . . and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live’ [Acts 17:26]. Nothing in your life is arbitrary. It’s all for a purpose.

Most amazing, God decided how you would be born. Regardless of the circumstances of your birth or who your parents are, God had a plan in creating you. It doesn’t matter whether your parents were good, bad, or indifferent. God knew that those two individuals possessed exactly the right genetic makeup to create the custom “you” He had in mind. They had the DNA God wanted to make you.

While there are illegitimate parents, there are no illegitimate children. Many children are unplanned by their parents, but they were not unplanned by God. God’s purpose took into account human error, and even sin” (The Purpose Driven Life, Rick Warren, p. 23).

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punch lines

“God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing” (Psalm 68:6, NIV).

“Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted” (Psalm 25:16, NIV).

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Luke 5:16, NIV).

“But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless” (Psalm 10:14, NIV).

“They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isaiah 35:10, NIV).

OUT OF THE STORY

What has been the loneliest time of your life, and how did you deal with it?

Who in this story might have felt lonely and cut off from others? Why?

How might the synagogue ruler and the bleeding woman feel powerless in their particular situations?

What would be worse: the grief and loneliness from a loved one who passed away or the loneliness from a life lived completely alone, shunned by society? Explain.

What can we learn from this story about Jesus’ power over loneliness and grief?

other eyes

“The walls we build around us to keep out the sadness also keep out the joy.”—Jim Rohn, American entrepreneur, author, and motivational speaker.

“Hope is a higher heart frequency, and as you begin to reconnect with your heart, hope is waiting to show you new possibilities and arrest the downward spiral of grief and loneliness. Listening to the still small voice in your heart will make hope into a reality”—Sara Paddison, American author.
Everybody is completely unique. Your thoughts, your experiences, your strengths and challenges are all your own. Look at these verses:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27, NIV).

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13, NIV).

“This is what the Lord says—he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen” (Isaiah 44:2, NIV).

Why do you think that God created you the way He did? Think of the thing that frustrates you the most about yourself. Why do you think that God included that in the complete package?

The analogy is made of a semitruck going down the highway. If that truck hit you, would you be changed? An encounter with such a large vehicle could not leave you unchanged. How much more should be changed by an encounter with the God of the universe? The woman with the problem with bleeding believed that only brushing the hem of Jesus’ robe would heal her. What in your life needs to be healed by an encounter with Jesus?

Consider this quote: “Originality does not consist in saying what no one has ever said before, but in saying exactly what you think”—James Fitzjames Stephen.

Ellen White says that God wants our praise to be “marked by our own individuality.” You can say it the way you feel it. You can talk the way you talk. What can you thank God for today that is perfectly unique to you?

Sometimes our individuality can make us feel separate from other people and misunderstood. How do these verses apply to you?

Psalm 68:6

Luke 5:16

Psalm 10:14

How can you be the answer to a lonely or grieving person’s prayer?

The nights of crying your eyes out give way to days of laughter” (King David, Psalm 30:5, Message).

“Friendship multiplies the good of life and divides the evil. ‘Tis the sole remedy against misfortune, the very ventilation of the soul” (Baltasar Gracian).

How can you be the answer to a lonely or grieving person’s prayer?

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"All over the field of Christ’s labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for the truth. The time had come to send the tidings of His love to these longing hearts. To all these the disciples were to go as His representatives. The believers would thus be led to look upon them as divinely appointed teachers, and when the Saviour should be taken from them they would not be left without instructors" (The Desire of Ages, p. 351).
what do you think?

Circle the top three reasons why you think some Christian teenagers are hesitant to share Christ with their friends:

- They are afraid of rejection.
- They don’t see it as important.
- They think Christianity is boring.
- They feel embarrassed.
- They don’t want to offend anyone.
- They believe that evangelism is the work of pastors or evangelists.
- They are too busy.
- They are too shy.

Circle the top three ways you think represent the most effective means to share Christ with others.

- Hand out gospel tracts.
- Stand on a street corner and preach.
- Always carry a Bible.
- Live a good life.
- Talk to my friends about Jesus.
- Invite a friend to church.
- Show kindness to others.
- Wear clothes that display a Christian message.
- Hang out with nonreligious people.
- Bring a friend to a social activity where your church friends will be.

did you know?

evangelism simply means telling people the gospel. We evangelize when we tell someone the gospel. It is not sharing opinions, telling stories, sharing our testimony, singing songs, etc. We may tell the gospel through various means such as these, but the main thing is the message, not the method.

“When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: ‘Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them.’ So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the gospel and healing people everywhere.”

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ‘Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. . . .

“Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. . . .

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. . . .

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. . . . And if anyone gives a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

(Luke 9:1-6; Matthew 10:5-8, 17-33, 40-42, NIV)
“Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: ‘God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18-20, Message).

“After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee preaching the Message of God: ‘Time’s up! God’s kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the Message’” (Mark 1:14, 15, Message).

“The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern” (Proverbs 29:7, NIV).

“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you’” (John 20:21, NIV).

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7, NIV).

“We must not mind insulting men, if by respecting them we offend God.” — St. John Chrysostom, 4th-century archbishop of Constantinople and Church Father.

“I used to say that I believed it was important to tell people about Jesus, but I never did. [My friend] Andrew very kindly explained that if I do not introduce people to Jesus, then I don’t believe Jesus is an important person. It doesn’t matter what I say.” — Donald Miller, Blue Like Jazz (Nelson, 2003), p. 110.
An old story tells of a woodsman who lived in the mountains of North Korea. While working in the forest one day, he was attacked by a huge tiger. The woodsman seized the tiger by the tail, and the tiger began turning around in circles, trying to get his teeth into the woodsman. A Buddhist monk, out for a walk, was attracted by the noise and sauntered over. The woodsman, upon seeing the monk, cried out, “Please take my ax there and kill this tiger before I am eaten alive.”

The monk, lowering his eyes and piously folding his hands, replied, “I am sorry but I cannot kill the tiger. You see, I am a Buddhist and as a Buddhist all life is sacred to me, be it insect, human, or animal.”

The woodsman answered, “Fortunately, I am not blessed with your belief so would you please take my place at the tail of the tiger and let me kill the beast.”

The monk agreed and they exchanged places. The woodsman then walked over, picked up his ax, placed it on his shoulder, and nonchalantly strolled off into the forest. The Buddhist monk, very much alarmed, cried out, “Please, come back and kill this tiger as you promised or else I will be devoured.”

The woodsman’s parting reply was: “I was so impressed by your example that I have become a convert to your belief.”

Is there more to evangelism than just setting a good example? Why or why not?

Monday

Read the Key Text and reflect on the following questions:

- Why do you think Jesus empowered His disciples to perform miracles?
- To what extent did Jesus perform miracles in His ministry?
- Is it possible to access that same “power and authority” of Jesus today? If so, how?

Tuesday

Quoted in the Flashlight section is this statement: “All over the field of Christ’s labor there were souls awakened to their need, and hungering and thirsting for the truth.” Spend time in prayer and ask God to reveal to you any friends or family members you may know who are “hungering and thirsting” for truth. Write their names on your prayer list.

Next, prayerfully consider how God might want you to share the gospel with the people on your list.

Wednesday

Read the two passages in the Punch Lines section that come from The Message paraphrase. Now choose one of the remaining verses from Punch Lines and translate it into contemporary language similar to what Eugene Peterson did with The Message.

Thursday

Consider this observation from Becky Pippert: “Christians and non-Christians have something in common. We’re both uptight about evangelism. Christians are afraid of offending. Non-Christians are afraid of being assaulted!”

Would you agree or disagree with Becky? Why?

Friday

In his award-winning book on evangelism, Just Walk Across the Room, Bill Hybels suggests that the single greatest gift Christ-followers can give to the people around them is an introduction to the God who created them, who loves them, and has a purpose for their lives. Hybels says: “This is what evangelism is—constantly looking for ways to give that gift to someone living far from God.”

To think about: How can I be more intentional about sharing that gift of life with those who are far from God?
“In all who are under the training of God is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, ‘Be still, and know that I am God’ Ps. 46:10. Here alone can true rest be found” (The Desire of Ages, p. 363).
Imagine that you are getting ready for school one day when you receive the news that school is cancelled for the day. That’s right! There is no school and you are free to do whatever you like. Rank the following activities on a scale of 1 (Gotta do it) to 8 (Not interested) to see what you will do with your day off.

____ Play video games all day
____ Call a friend to go shopping
____ Pick up trash around your neighborhood
____ Text message some friends
____ Sleep
____ Check out your Facebook, MySpace, Bebo pages
____ Turn off all media (chill)
____ Surf the Internet
____ Do nothing
____ Read

much of this week’s Sabbath School lesson takes place around a small Galilean seaside village called Bethsaida. Bethsaida literally means “House of the Fisherman,” and it had that name before Jesus, the Fisher of men, showed up. It was the birthplace of Peter, Andrew, and Philip, three of Jesus’ disciples, and all of whom were fishermen. It was near Bethsaida that Jesus and the disciples rested, where Jesus fed the 5,000, and where the disciples saw Jesus walk on water. Bethsaida was quite a place.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

“During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified.

“‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.

“But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’

“‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’

“‘Come,’ he said.

“Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’

“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’

“And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’”

(Matthew 14:13-33, NIV)
punch lines

“My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest” (Isaiah 32:18, NIV).

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5, 6, NIV).

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV).

“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3, NIV).

“Stress is nothing more than a socially acceptable form of mental illness.” — Richard Carlson, 20th-century American actor and author.

“Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop.” — Ovid, Roman poet, 43 B.C.-17 A.D.

“Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save.” — Will Rogers, 20th-century entertainer.
Sabbath

What activities were at the top of your list in the What Do You Think? activity? Take your Bible and turn to Matthew 14:18-23. After the feeding of the 5,000, what did Jesus tell the disciples to do? Why do you think Jesus told the disciples to leave Him, get on a boat, and travel across the Lake of Galilee?

What did Jesus do after the multitudes were gone and the crowds were dispersed?

Prayer is the most intimate way to connect with God. That is why disciples are encouraged to make it a part of their daily spiritual regimen. Prayer, Bible study, solitude, and other activities that help us to grow in our relationship with God are called spiritual disciplines.

Sunday

Read the account of the feeding of the 5,000 found in John 6:1-13. John gives much more detail about the conversation that took place between Jesus and the disciples as they prepared to minister.

Besides the obvious, what spiritual lesson did the people take away from the celebration that happened that day?

Through the spiritual discipline of fellowship, believers help to shelter each other from life’s stormy weather. That was one of the truths that Jesus modeled during the feeding of the 5,000.

Monday

This Sabbath’s Key Text is part of the backstory to the Into the Story passage. The disciples had just returned from a very successful evangelistic campaign. God used them to exercise demons, heal the sick, return sight to the blind, help the lame walk, and much more. It was an awesome display of God’s power.

But then Jesus said: “Come with me by yourself to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31, NIV). Why do you think Jesus called His disciples aside for some rest and relaxation? Did they need only physical rest?

Look up the meaning of the word “discipline” in a dictionary. One definition is the ability to behave in a controlled or calm way even in a stressful situation. Is it possible to be calm in a stressful situation if one never takes any time to be quiet? Explain.

When was the last time you abstained from all media so that you could hear from God?

Tuesday

This week’s Flashlight is extremely powerful. Let’s examine one aspect of the statement. The opening line says: “In all who are under the training of God is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices. . . .” In your own words, write what you think it means to have a life that is out of harmony with the rest of the world.

Based on what you’ve learned about Jesus so far this week, how was His life out of harmony with the norms of His day?

Wednesday

This week’s Punch Lines are filled with Scripture that you should commit to memory. Which one of them stands out to you?

God has promised to direct you and to show you “unsearchable things” (Jeremiah 33:3), mysteries that confound people who are disconnected from God. But to find out the deep things of God, you have to submit yourself to Him.

This week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 38, 39, 40.

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www.cornerstoneconnections.net
misunderstood

flashlight

“The giver of the manna was standing among them. It was Christ Himself who had led the Hebrews through the wilderness, and had daily fed them with the bread from heaven. That food was a type of the real bread from heaven. The life-giving Spirit, flowing from the infinite fullness of God, is the true manna. Jesus said, ‘The bread of God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world.’ John 6:33, RV Still thinking that it was temporal food to which Jesus referred, some of His hearers exclaimed, ‘Lord, evermore give us this bread.’ Jesus then spoke plainly: ‘I am the bread of life!’” (The Desire of Ages, p. 386).

Scripture Story: John 6:22-42; Matthew 15:1, 2; Mark 7:1-23.
Commentary: The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 41, 42.

key text

“They said, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, “I came down from heaven?”’”

(John 6:42, NIV)
The message below was sent by a company CEO to one of his managers. The manager was then to share the memo with the department chief, who then shared with the floor manager. The floor manager passed it on to the supervisor who then gave the message to the staff. Here’s the CEO’s original message:

“Today at 11 o’clock there will be a total eclipse of the sun. This is when the sun disappears behind the moon for two minutes. As this is something that cannot be seen every day, time will be allowed for employees to view the eclipse in the parking lot. . . . Safety goggles will be made available at a small cost.”

Now here’s the message that the supervisor delivered to the staff.

“Some staff will go to the car park today to see the CEO disappear. It is a pity this doesn’t happen every day.”

How did the CEO’s message get changed so much?

The ministry of Jesus got ever more dangerous once He began to reveal who He was—the Son of God, the Bread from heaven. As you’ll learn this week, the scribes and Pharisees looked for every opportunity to destroy Him. Their opposition became so fierce about a year before Jesus’ death that He was forced to flee to a region called Phoenicia, a place where there were few Jews. Jesus and the disciples kept a low profile there, but their time was not wasted. Jesus used the time in Phoenicia to acquaint His disciples with the needs of unbelievers. You see the results of Jesus’ efforts in the book of Acts!
punch lines

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11, 12, NIV).

“Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (Psalm 119:165, KJV).

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6, KJV).

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Timothy 3:12, 13, NIV).

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26, NIV).

other eyes

“The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word ‘crisis.’ One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger—but recognize the opportunity.”—John F. Kennedy, 20th-century American president (1961-1963).
Sabbath
What did you think of the What Do You Think? activity? Sort of crazy, isn’t it? It’s amazing how words can get twisted once they begin to travel from person to person. This was something that Jesus experienced on numerous occasions.

Why was Jesus so misunderstood by the multitudes (Matthew 13:34, 35)?

Why do you think Jesus used parables instead of speaking plainly to the people?

Would people have understood Jesus if He had tried to explain His entire mission? Why or why not?

Sunday
After reading the Into the Story section, complete the Out of the Story exercise. Did you notice anything peculiar about the negative response of the people when Jesus declared that He was the Bread sent from heaven? Remember, this crowd had heard all about Jesus’ feeding of the 5,000 just a day or two before. That’s why they came to Him.

If they knew that Jesus had performed such an awesome miracle, why were they so offended when He said that He was sent from God?

Weren’t the miracles Jesus performed proof enough that He was not of this world? Why do people continue to doubt that Jesus was sent from God?

Monday
This Sabbath’s Key Text is essential to understanding why people back in Jesus’ time, and even people today, have problems accepting the deity or divine nature of Jesus. These people knew who Jesus’ mother and “father” were, or so they thought.

Read John 6:43, the verse that follows the Key Text. Why didn’t Jesus take this opportunity to explain His mysterious birth and miraculous parentage?

Tuesday
Feel the heat coming from this week’s Flashlight quotation by Ellen G. White. Can’t you see Jesus standing in the middle of a questioning crowd and declaring, “I am the bread of life”? That must have sent shockwaves around the universe.

Read Deuteronomy 8:3 and Jeremiah 15:16. What statement does Moses make about the Word of God in Deuteronomy 8:3?

What did Jeremiah do once he found God’s Word?

Jesus was the Word of God (John 1) made flesh, the Bread of life capable of removing all hunger. If the Jews had understood the Scriptures, they would have seen that Jesus was the living, breathing embodiment of the Word that captivated Moses and Jeremiah.

Wednesday
Read this week’s Punch Lines. Choose one or more to commit to memory today.

Psalm 119:165 states: “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (KJV).

How does one get to a spiritual point where nothing can offend them? Is this even possible? Explain.

Share one lesson you learned from this week’s Punch Lines about how to handle spiritual trials.

Thursday
Jesus charged that the scribes and Pharisees “honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:8, NIV).

Is your heart close to God? List two things you need to do to improve your walk with God.

1.
2.

What’s preventing you from doing those things? Why not whisper a prayer and ask God to change you right now?

Friday
Jesus urged His listeners to partake of Him, to eat His flesh and drink His blood. How does one do this? Is it possible?

When we study the life of Jesus in God’s Word and ask the Holy Spirit to bring the life of Jesus into our lives, isn’t this a form of eating His flesh and drinking His blood?


this week’s reading*
The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 41, 42.

A special adaptation of The Desire of Ages, entitled Humble Hero, 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.
“Christ knew this woman’s situation. He knew that she was longing to see Him, and He placed Himself in her path. By ministering to her sorrow, He could give a living representation of the lesson He designed to teach. For this He had brought His disciples into this region. He desired them to see the ignorance existing in cities and villages close to the land of Israel. The people who had been given every opportunity to understand the truth were without a knowledge of the needs of those around them. No effort was made to help souls in darkness. The partition wall which Jewish pride had erected shut even the disciples from sympathy with the heathen world. But these barriers were to be broken down” (The Desire of Ages, p. 400).

Scripture Story: Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30. 
Commentary: The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapter 43.

“…The woman came and knelt before him. ‘Lord, help me!’ she said. He replied, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she said, ‘but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’”

( Matthew 15:25-28, CEV)
Many things in today’s society cause prejudice against others. Rate each item below 1 to 10 on how powerfully they cause prejudice, with 1 being the greatest cause and 10 being the least.

Religion
Race
Location
Culture
Poverty
Wealth
Gender
Sexual orientation
Political preference

During the times when Jesus was preaching, prejudices were common, especially against non-Jews. Many places that Jesus walked overlooked the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, both containing heathen temples, palaces, markets, and shipping harbors. The Phoenician religion was based on the process and power of nature. They worshipped many different gods and had various amounts of pagan rituals and customs. A pantheon was presided over by the father of the gods, but a goddess was the main figure within this Phoenician pantheon. These extreme religious differences fueled the anger of the Jews and sparked even more hatred and prejudice between the two groups. To be a Phoenician was to be considered lowly and beyond notice to many Jews.

During the times when Jesus was preaching, prejudices were common, especially against non-Jews. Many places that Jesus walked overlooked the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, both containing heathen temples, palaces, markets, and shipping harbors. The Phoenician religion was based on the process and power of nature. They worshipped many different gods and had various amounts of pagan rituals and customs. A pantheon was presided over by the father of the gods, but a goddess was the main figure within this Phoenician pantheon. These extreme religious differences fueled the anger of the Jews and sparked even more hatred and prejudice between the two groups. To be a Phoenician was to be considered lowly and beyond notice to many Jews.

“Jesus left and went to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Suddenly a Canaanite woman from there came out shouting, ‘Lord and Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is full of demons.’ Jesus did not say a word. But the woman kept following along and shouting, so his disciples came up and asked him to send her away. Jesus said, ‘I was sent only to the people of Israel! They are like a flock of lost sheep.’

“The woman came closer. Then she knelt down and begged, ‘Please help me, Lord!’

“Jesus replied, ‘It isn’t right to take food away from children and feed it to dogs.’ ‘Lord, that’s true,’ the woman said, ‘but even dogs get the crumbs that fall from their owner’s table.’ ‘Dear woman, you really do have a lot of faith, and you will be given what you want.’ At that moment her daughter was healed.”

(Matthew 15:21-28, CEV)
“It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed” (Deuteronomy 31:8, ESV).

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10, NIV).

“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11, NIV).

“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them” (Psalm 145:18, 19, NIV).

“But Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11, NIV).

“Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Psalm 34:10, ESV).

“We are each burdened with prejudice; against the poor or the rich, the smart or the slow, the gaunt or the obese. It is natural to develop prejudices. It is noble to rise above them.”—Author unknown.

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.”—Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th-century American essayist.
This woman demonstrated a powerful amount of faith in Jesus. She was a hea-then, and all Jews looked down upon her. How-ever, rather than letting others’ opinions of her keep her from moving forward, she came to Jesus with a heart full of hope and faith in Him. In our lives there are many ways in which we let doubt reign in our hearts. Many people saw this woman as a sinner, but we can look to her as an example of how to demonstrate our faith.

We are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of Jesus, yet humbly ask Him for what we wish. Many times we assume our wishes are either too extravagant or too unimportant for God to worry about, but all we have to do is trust and hope in the Lord to do what He sees fit. How can I put my faith in God in the coming week for the little and the monumental things?

In this lesson we learned how prejudice can affect us in many negative ways. It can eat us alive until we don’t try to see people for who they truly are, but we see a veil of all our bias and prejudices made into one ugly image. Jesus looked past this woman’s flaws and noticed her faith in Him. Below list a few ways in which we can demonstrate Christ’s unconditional love and look past others’ flaws:

1. _______________________________
2. _______________________________
3. _______________________________

Take your Bible and search it to find as many verses as you can on the topics of prejudice and faith. Try to find different stories or Bible quotes that involve those topics and then tie them together. There are many stories in the New Testament about faith. Compare each one to the other, pointing out similarities and differences between the main characters.

The Flashlight quote revealed how we can be blind to the needs of people around us because of our prejudices.

Try to identify areas in your life in which you might hold some prejudice against others. Often prejudices can be subconscious. Read through the Bible and ask God to help you identify areas of prejudice in your life so you can eliminate them, as well as ask Him to reveal to you the needs of those people against whom you’ve been biased.

Faith can be a difficult thing. It means going against the odds and putting your trust in something that you don’t fully understand. But faith should not be blind. This Phoenician woman knew that Jesus was a healer. She knew that He had the power to heal her daughter, even when others didn’t. Even when it looked as if she wouldn’t get her wish she still kept pleading with Jesus. The Bible says, “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find.”

What areas of your life—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual—need the healing power of Jesus?

1. _______________________________
2. _______________________________
3. _______________________________

Colossians 3:11 says: “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircum-cised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (NIV). Also, Acts 10:34 says: “Now I am certain that God treats all people alike” (CEV). We are all equal in God’s eyes. If we are equal in His eyes, then why should we see others as beneath or above us? We should treat all with the same equality that Jesus demonstrated. He showed us that it didn’t matter who you are or where you are from; all people are entitled to His gift of hope and eternal life. Write down a few examples in a journal or notebook of what can help you break down the barriers of prejudice and show God’s love to all people.

This is an excerpt from The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero). Do you want to read more about this? You can download the whole book at www.cornerstoneconnections.net. For more information about this plan, follow the plan at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

This week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapter 43.

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flashlight

“If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.’ How many a sin-burdened soul has echoed that prayer. And to all, the pitying Saviour’s answer is, ‘If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.’ It is faith that connects us with heaven, and brings us strength for coping with the powers of darkness. . . . Look not to self, but to Christ. . . . You can never perish while you do this—never” (The Desire of Ages, p. 429).
Rank the following in the order that they occur in the life of a Christian.

1. Belief
2. Wisdom
3. Knowledge
4. Faith

Explain the reasons for the order you chose.

INTO THE STORY

“When they came back down the mountain to the other disciples, they saw a huge crowd around them, and the religion scholars cross-examining them. As soon as the people in the crowd saw Jesus, admiring excitement stirred them. They ran and greeted him. He asked, ‘What’s going on? What’s all the commotion?’

“A man out of the crowd answered, ‘Teacher, I brought my mute son, made speechless by a demon, to you. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and goes stiff as a board. I told your disciples, hoping they could deliver him, but they couldn’t.’

“Jesus said, ‘What a generation! No sense of God! How many times do I have to go over these things? How much longer do I have to put up with this? Bring the boy here.’ They brought him. When the demon saw Jesus, it threw the boy into a seizure, causing him to writhe on the ground and foam at the mouth.

“He asked the boy’s father, ‘How long has this been going on?’ ‘Ever since he was a little boy. Many times it pitches him into fire or the river to do away with him. If you can do anything, do it. Have a heart and help us!’

“Jesus said, ‘If? There are no “ifs” among believers. Anything can happen.’

“Seeing that the crowd was forming fast, Jesus gave the vile spirit its marching orders: ‘Dumb and deaf spirit, I command you—Out of him, and stay out!’ Screaming, and with much thrashing about, it left. The boy was pale as a corpse, so people started saying, ‘He’s dead.’ But Jesus, taking his hand, raised him. The boy stood up.”

“Then the disciples came to Jesus in private. They asked, ‘Why couldn’t we drive out the demon?’

“He replied, ‘Because your faith is much too small. What I’m about to tell you is true. If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, it is enough. You can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there.” And it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.’”

(Mark 9:14-27, Message; Matthew 17:19-21, NIV)
**OUT OF THE STORY**

What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “O unbelieving and perverse generation, . . . how long shall I stay with you?”

Why were the disciples not able to heal this boy after they had already been healing other people?

At what point did the father actually have the faith required for his son to be healed?

What role would the father's faith have played if the demon-possessed boy had not been willing to be submissive to Jesus? How does this affect you today when your parents pray for you?

Why don't we see more healing today?

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**punch lines**

“So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly” (Ecclesiastes 7:25, NIV).

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:5-7, NIV).

“Investigate my life, O God, find out everything about me; cross-examine and test me, get a clear picture of what I’m about; see for yourself whether I’ve done anything wrong—then guide me on the road to eternal life” (Psalm 139:23, 24, Message).

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28, 29, NIV).

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**other eyes**

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”—Jim Elliott, 20th-century missionary to Ecuador.

“By faith you can move mountains; but the important thing is not to move the mountains, but to have the faith.”—Arthur Clutton-Brock, 19th-20th-century British essayist.
Sabbath

In a small group of friends, share the answers you gave in the What Do You Think? section. Then read 1 Peter 1:3–8. Do these verses change the order in which you originally listed the items in What Do You Think? If so, what changes did you make and why?

Sunday

Think about the story of Jesus, the disciples, and the demon-possessed boy. Reflect on the following questions:

Jesus said, “This kind comes out only with prayer.” Certainly the disciples had been praying when they had cast out other demons before. But it wasn’t enough for this situation. How many demons have you cast out? What do you need to do to have enough understanding of and relationship with God to cast out demons or to move mountains?

Monday

The closer you are to getting your driver’s license, the harder it is to sit in the passenger’s seat. At this time in your life, Jesus wants you to have the faith to move mountains. Are you excited about moving mountains? Describe how this excitement, or lack of, shows your true spiritual condition and readiness for heaven.

Tuesday

Just give me the facts.” People always want to know the bottom line of what has to be done to achieve any worthy goal. What does Ellen White mean when she writes “You can never perish” when you cry out to Jesus? Does she mean perishing literally or spiritually? Knowing that you can never perish while you cry out to Jesus, what would crying out in your life look like today?

Wednesday

God already knows what is in your heart. You need to see what He sees by being honest with yourself about your spiritual condition.

Read the Punch Lines again. Make a list of three action steps you see you need to take based on your self-evaluation. What do these texts say to you today about where you are spiritually? How can you implement them in ways that will help you grow in your relationship with Jesus?

Thursday

Ellen White writes about how the crowd was beginning to turn on the disciples when they couldn’t heal the demon-possessed boy. The scribes who were in the crowd were encouraging this behavior. As soon as Jesus appeared, the crowd changed and they fell silent, waiting to see what Jesus would do. Compare this to Jesus and the crowds when He stood before Pilate. How quickly the crowd was beginning to turn on Jesus, when we are trying to figure out what real Christianity looks like in the real world?

What does your spirituality look like, and how are you going to reflect Jesus this week?

Friday

Mike Yaconelli writes: “How could anyone accuse me of being spiritual unless spirituality comes in unlimited shapes and sizes, unless spirituality looks like whatever you and I look like when we’re thinking about Jesus, when we are trying to find Jesus, when we are trying to figure out what real Christianity looks like in the real world?” (Messy Spirituality, p. 26).

What does your spirituality look like, and how are you going to reflect Jesus this week?

this week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 44, 45, 46, 47.

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who is Jesus?

“God is light; and in the words, ‘I am the light of the world,’ Christ declared His oneness with God, and His relation to the whole human family. It was He who at the beginning had caused ‘the light to shine out of darkness.’ 2 Cor. 4:6. He is the light of sun and moon and star. He was the spiritual light that in symbol and type and prophecy had shone upon Israel. . . . As the sunbeams penetrate to the remotest corners of the earth, so does the light of the Sun of Righteousness shine upon every soul” (The Desire of Ages, p. 464).

Scripture Story: John 7; 8; 9; 10:1-30.
Commentary: The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 49, 50, 51, 52.

flashlight

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

(John 8:12, NIV)
**What do you think?**

*What do you think is the reason Jesus’ contemporaries had such a difficult time believing in Him as the Messiah?*

- Lack of evidence
- Pride
- Jesus’ choice of friends
- Jesus’ background
- His incredible claims

It’s easy to be critical of the religious people who challenged and rejected Jesus. But remember, today we have the historical reality of Jesus’ life, sacrificial death, resurrection, and the witness of the first disciples and the early church. Yet many people can’t seem to believe that Jesus was/is God in the flesh. As you study the lesson, think about why this may be. What do you think of Jesus?

**Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and secular people all believe in Jesus. Whether it is that He is a prophet or religious leader in history among all the other prophets, or whether it’s that He was a good man who set a good example, or even that He is one god among a myriad of gods, almost everyone believes something about Jesus. Our global community has absorbed Jesus into its culture. So, as it turns out, all these centuries after Jesus’ life, things haven’t changed so much when it comes to all the different opinions people have about Jesus. Who do you say Jesus is? What you believe about Jesus makes all the difference in the world!*
Read through John, 7 through 10 and list some of the things people were saying about Jesus.

“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him’” (John 7:37, 38, NIV).

“Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own’” (John 7:16, NIV).

“‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58, NIV).

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’” (John 8:12, NIV).

“Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep’” (John 10:7, NIV).

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NIV).

Why did the religious leaders become enraged with Jesus and want to kill Him? (John 8:58; 10:33).

“People often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice.” —C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.
Sabbath
In the What Do You Think? section you had the opportunity to consider what people in Jesus’ day thought about Him and how that compares to today’s global culture. Do you know anyone who isn’t a Christian? Have you gotten an idea of what they think about Jesus? Do you have any Jewish friends, or Muslims, or Hindus, or Buddhists? Have you found that they all accept Jesus on some level? What will they not accept about Him?

Sunday
After reading the Into the Story section and answering the questions in the Out of the Story section, ask yourself this question: What systems were in place for Jewish people so that they should have been able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah?

Monday
Why were there so many differing opinions about Jesus—in His day and in ours? What are the barriers to having a clear view of Him?

Tuesday
In this week’s Flashlight Ellen White gives us deep insight into how meaningful Christ’s claim about Himself was. Jesus was calling Himself light—the source of all light. Go back to chapter 51 of The Desire of Ages, page 464, and read the complete quote and the context around it. List all the events this claim would have brought to mind to His Jewish listeners. Then read Revelation 21:22-24. Can you imagine that when Jesus said these words as He stood in the court of the Temple on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles that He saw way beyond earth’s history, and knew how fully and thoroughly He could meet every need of the human soul and give us more than we could ever begin to fathom? Also, while you are in Revelation 21, take a look at verse 6!

Wednesday
Read and think about this week’s Punch Lines.

As you read through all the claims made by Jesus in this week’s Punch Lines, what did you notice about Him that separates Him from all other religious gurus and prophets? Notice that Jesus doesn’t brag about being educated by human teachers. He has it on direct authority from God. What kind of challenges did that claim cause for Him?

Look at His other claims. Jesus didn’t say He would point people to the light; He said, “I am the light!” He wasn’t claiming to give us living water; He is the living water; He is the way; He is the gate by which we enter God’s kingdom. He is the shepherd who leads us!

In making His claims about Himself Jesus was using the name that God had taught Moses. The Hebrew word is Yahweh—it means I AM. When Moses asked God who he should tell Pharaoh had sent him, God said, “Tell Pharaoh, ‘I AM’ (or Yahweh) sent you.” Jesus was claiming THE NAME! Imagine if you were in the crowd hearing Jesus say this. Can you get a better grasp of why the religious leaders wanted to stone Him? How might you react? How quick are we to defend our traditions? Don’t you get unnerved when what you believe is challenged?

Thursday
Read the quotations in Other Eyes. Why is C. S. Lewis’s observation as important today as when he said it more than 50 years ago?

Friday
Unlike the other Gospel narratives, John’s Gospel gives us a picture of Jesus in the context of Jewish tradition and religious ritual. In doing so, he gives us the deepest spiritual insights into how Jesus is the fulfillment of all the symbolisms God had given to the Jews to teach them of His plan of redemption and restoration.

Through His Word and in the Sabbath and annual feasts, even in each item of the Temple, God used objects, events, and ritual to teach how He would save His people. Showing Jesus in that backdrop of everyday life and religious activity, John gave to the Jewish mind the idea that all those symbols are complete in Jesus. He’s the real thing! He’s the long-awaited Messiah who would save not just the Jews, but the Gentiles too!

Which of the sayings and miracles of Jesus in this lesson stood out most to you? Why? What insights have you gained?

*This week’s reading*
The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 49, 50, 51, 52.

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a tale of two seekers

flashlight

“When Christ’s followers give back to the Lord His own, they are accumulating treasure which will be given to them when they shall hear the words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord’” (The Desire of Ages, p. 523).

Commentary: The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 53, 54, 57.

"‘You know the commandments: “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, . . .”’ Teacher, he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’ Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor. . . . Then come, follow me.’”

(Mark 10:19-21, NIV)

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
Rank the following: which do you think is the hardest to give up for following Christ? (1-most difficult, 6-least difficult)

___ Popularity or public opinion
___ Money/wealth
___ Ideas and prejudices
___ Security of your future
___ Power and influence
___ Success and achievement

Which do you think is the most difficult to surrender to Christ? While different people can treasure different things, how does being aware that you might treasure something more than Christ affect your choices?

When Jesus gives you “the look.”

The rich young ruler came to Christ wanting to know how to achieve eternal life. What you may not know is that it is one of several places in the Gospels where Jesus gave someone “the look.” However, Mark is the only writer that says, “Jesus looked at him and loved him.” “The look” conveyed a loving appeal to follow. “The look” was a challenge to aim his heart beyond the world. “The look” conveyed grief as well, because Christ knew his heart was so deeply entangled with wealth that such a leap of faith was more than the ruler was willing to take. The word for “look” means to go beyond seeing something to perceiving it.

“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘What is written in the Law?’ he replied. ‘How do you read it?’ He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”’; and, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ‘You have answered correctly,’ Jesus replied. ‘Do this and you will live.’

“But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’

“In reply Jesus said: ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. “Look after him,” he said, “and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’

“Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’”

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.”’

“Teacher,’ he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’

“Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’

“At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’”

(Luke 10:25-37; Mark 10:17-23, NIV)
“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21, NIV).

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts” (Deuteronomy 6:5, 6, NIV).

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34, NIV).

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple” (Psalm 19:7, NIV).

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36, 37, NASB).

“One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime.” —Jim Elliot, 20th-century missionary to Ecuador.

“Wealth takes away the sharp edges of our moral sensitivities and allows a comfortable confusion about sin and virtue.” —Henri Nouwen, 20th-century writer.

Read the two stories carefully and highlight their basic question for Jesus. What do they want from Him?

Below, make a list of the commonalities of these two seekers as well as the differences.

Commonalities:

Differences:

Underline the key words and phrases you see in this passage.

Why do you think Jesus first and foremost directs both seekers back to the law of God?

Is there anything you can tell from the text that signifies either of these seekers is genuine? What evidence is there that their heart might be in the right place, if any?

Why do you think Jesus asked, “Why do you call me good? No one is good—except God alone.”

What do you think is the message God has for you in these stories?
**Sunday**

Read the *Into the Story* section and use the questions in the *Out of the Story* section to guide your study. Which story speaks to you personally today? Which seems more dangerous: knowing you treasure worldly things but not having the courage to say with Paul, “Nothing gets in the way of my relationship with God”? As you reflect on the areas you are compelled or influenced by, pray a specific prayer of surrender today. Also, consider what Jim Elliot is quoted saying in the *Other Eyes* section of this week’s lesson.

**Saturday**

Read the quote from *The Desire of Ages* in the *Flashlight* section and reflect on the things you do for a reward. List them out. It seems like everything we do has a reward, but not everything has the same reward. What is worth more to you than eternal life? Whom do you know who values heaven and eternal life more than anything else on earth? If you want to make their day, tell them in whatever way you think is best, “I want to thank you for the way you love eternal life more than anything else.” See what happens.

**Wednesday**

The *Punch Lines* in this week’s lesson pierce through the pleasantries of life and hit the core issue: What do we want most? What do we treasure? What are we willing to do, to give, to resist, to embrace to obtain our heart’s desire? If you were to order the *Punch Lines* in a Bible study for the rich young ruler, what order would you put them in, and why? If you were to do a Bible study for the expert in the law, how would you organize these verses to make the greatest impact? Why? Think of someone you know who reminds you of the lawyer or the ruler, or both, and dedicate time to pray for them today.

**Monday**

The *Key Text* this week comes from Mark 10:19-21, where Jesus peers into the soul of the ruler and sees everything.

What do you think Jesus saw in the ruler? Think of someone you know who genuinely wants to do the right thing or who desires to follow Christ but somehow can’t seem to do it. Pray for them today and perhaps send them a note or an email encouraging them with the news that Jesus sees them and loves them.

**Tuesday**

Read the quote from *The Desire of Ages* in the *Flashlight* section and reflect on the things you do for a reward. List them out. It seems like everything we do has a reward, but not everything has the same reward. What is worth more to you than eternal life? Whom do you know who values heaven and eternal life more than anything else on earth? If you want to make their day, tell them in whatever way you think is best, “I want to thank you for the way you love eternal life more than anything else.” See what happens.

**Friday**

Reflect on experiences in your life when you were torn between two good things. How do you make decisions in the here and now about noble things to achieve? By what reference point do you look at the things you want or choose to do? Take time to ruminate on a biblical character who had to make big decisions that were monumental to the ultimate outcome of their life. As you look at their story consider how your story resonates with the great challenge for all who choose to follow Christ—the challenge to make Him first and best above all.

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**this week’s reading**

*The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 53, 54, 57.*

A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled Humble Hero, 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.
“It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years” (The Desire of Ages, p. 515).

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.’” (Mark 10:13, 14, NIV)
Which do you think is more difficult: For a child to feel self-reliant or an adult to become dependent?

Make a list of three qualities of a child that adults should never outgrow:

1. _______________________________________
2. _____________________________________
3. ____________________________________

Which of these qualities would you desire the most? Why?

___________________________________
__________________________________

In what way can believers in Christ be childlike but not childish? Explain the difference.

______________________________
______________________________
______________________________

It seems as if humans are rarely happy with their age. Kids want to grow and be “big people,” and grown-ups envy the energy and life of youth. Have you ever noticed that the root of the word “juvenile” comes from the same word that we get the word “rejuvenate”? The noun form is “rejuvenescence,” which conveys the notion of renewing youth. The oldest record of this term goes all the way back to the early 1600s. But long before such words were invented, Jesus valued the concept of “becoming like a child.”

“People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.”

(Matthew 19:13-16, NASB)

“And they were bringing even their babies to Him so that He would touch them, but when the disciples saw it, they began rebuking them. But Jesus called for them, saying, ‘Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.’”

(Luke 18:15-17, NASB)

“Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.”

(Mark 10:13-16, NIV)
“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward” (Matthew 10:42, NIV).

“Don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity” (1 Timothy 4:12, NLT).

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Matthew 18:1-3, NIV).

“Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4, NASB).

“Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, NASB).

“People who do not like children are swine, dunces, and blockheads, not worthy to be called men and women, because they despise the blessing of God, the Creator and Author of marriage.”—Martin Luther, 16th-century German theologian.

“Now, as always, God discloses himself to ‘babes’ and hides himself in thick darkness from the wise and prudent. We must simplify our approach to him. . . . We must put away all effort to impress, and come with the guileless candor of childhood.”—A. W. Tozer, 20th-century American author and preacher.
Sabbath

Read and respond to the voting question in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. As you reflect on the many encounters between Jesus and people, think about the way such people received the Savior. Did those who came to Christ in simplicity, humility, and with utter dependence on His mercy fall away or struggle? Consider how people such as Nicodemus and the rich young ruler were confounded by the nature of Christ’s kingdom while the “childlike” seemed to “get it.” In John 1:10-13 the Bible says: “He came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.” (NLT). What would be different about your life if you started each day by “believing” and “receiving” Christ as a child would?

Sunday

Read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to guide your study. The three perspectives on the story of Jesus blessing the children are very similar. What phrase or portion of this passage speaks personally to you today? What do you think is the central message God has for you in this story?

Monday

The Key Text this week comes from Mark 10:13-15. I see two lessons that emerge from this text: (1) Don’t get in the way of a child coming to Jesus, and (2) the way to His kingdom is with a childlike spirit. What other lessons emerge? Think of a child in your sphere of influence that you can pray for and perhaps help get to know Christ better.

Tuesday

Read the quote from The Desire of Ages in the Flashlight section and think of an adult you know who truly believes that children are “most susceptible” to the kingdom of God. Think of Sabbath School teachers, youth leaders, and people who celebrate the wonder of childhood. What words would you use to describe their leadership and their impact in your church?

Wednesday

The Punch Lines in this week’s lesson underscore the value of children and youth in Scripture. Read through each passage and note the verse that is speaking to you today. What stories from the Bible illustrate these verses? Place names or events from Scripture that convey the childlike qualities Christ is calling for in His followers. For example: when David decided to attack Goliath it was not because he felt grown-up but because he trusted that his God was big. His childlike trust in God is what compelled such grown-up courage.

Thursday

Take time to intentionally observe children today. Watch the way they learn, play, interact, and relate to the people around them. Consider how they deal with problems or challenges that seem too big for them. Think of three children in your church and write them a note of encouragement, affirming a quality about them that is inspiring. Be as specific as you can with your note of affirmation. You can decide whether you share these words anonymously or not, but make a clear path to Jesus for the children you know and maybe you will discover what Jesus meant by the phrase “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (NIV).

Friday

Reflect on an event or experience in your life when you had to depend on someone else with complete and simple trust. What are some of the emotions you felt? How does childlike trust make you a mature believer in Christ?

For this week’s reading* The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapters 55, 56.

A special adaptation of The Desire of Ages, entitled Humble Hero, 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.
wake up!

flashlight

“Christ did not weep for Lazarus; for He was about to call him from the grave. He wept because many of those now mourning for Lazarus would soon plan the death of Him who was the resurrection and the life” (The Desire of Ages, p. 533).
Voting: Agree or Disagree

____ Raising someone from the dead is far more powerful a miracle than feeding 5,000 people or healing someone from leprosy.

____ The miraculous signs Jesus did grew out of His compassion for broken people more than His desire to prove to people He was the Son of God.

Indicate why you voted “agree” or “disagree.”

____________________________________
___________________________________
__________________________________
_________________________________

When Mary and Martha were weeping for their dead brother, Lazarus, it was more like a wild wailing.

In fact, did you know that in that day they paid people to make a horrible noise of wailing and weeping at funerals just to emphasize the sadness of death? When Jesus wept, the word is not the same word for wailing, but for a deep, quiet grief that words can’t really capture.

“On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. . . . When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died. . . .’

Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’

‘Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’

‘Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’

‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him, ‘I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.’

“And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. ‘The Teacher is here,’ she said, ‘and is asking for you.’ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. . . .

“When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’

“When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you laid him?’ he asked.

‘Come and see, Lord,’ they replied.

‘Jesus wept.

‘Then the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’ . . .

‘Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ‘Take away the stone,’ he said . . .

“So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.’

“When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

‘Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’

(John 11:17-44, NIV)
“Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about those Christians who have died so you will not be sad, as others who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and that he rose again. So, because of him, God will raise with Jesus those who have died. What we tell you now is the Lord’s own message. We who are living when the Lord comes again will not go before those who have already died. The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. And those who have died believing in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16, NCV).

“Still, I know that God lives—the One who gives me back my life—and eventually he’ll take his stand on earth. And I’ll see him—even though I get skinned alive!—see God myself, with my very own eyes. Oh, how I long for that day!” (Job 19:25-27, Message).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:25-27, NASB).

“Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.”—Augustine, 4th-century theologian.

“The world is not lacking in wonders, but in a sense of wonder.”—G. K. Chesterton, 20th-century English writer.
Sabbath

Read and respond to the voting question in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. Looking at the miraculous things Jesus did, some things today seem more miraculous than others. Mending a broken hand or opening blind eyes is common practice for doctors, but most of medicine’s power today is an attempt to delay the inevitable—death. Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 and reflect on how Christ has done at Calvary what medicine could never do.

Sunday

Read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to guide your study. This week’s lesson is filled with various characters, emotions, and events that are relevant to all people today. With so many parts of the raising of Lazarus story to choose from, which scene compels you the most? Why? When you read this story, what do you think God is trying to say to you about your life?

Monday

The Key Text this week is short; in fact, the shortest. But don’t let the size of the verse trick you into not grasping its full meaning. Why did Jesus weep? Look at the Did You Know? section as well and examine what you think troubled Jesus to tears more: the apparent effect death had over His friends, or the stubborn shortsighted minds that were planning to kill Him. Perhaps this day you could look at your life through the lens of what makes Jesus weep. When people are mistreated—Jesus weeps. When people don’t—won’t—look at the big picture of the plan of salvation—Jesus weeps. When people are confused about the future and no one is there to say, “God has made a way”—Jesus weeps. While this verse may be easy to remember, try not to forget its meaning.

Tuesday

Read the quote from The Desire of Ages in the Flashlight section that describes what really caused Jesus to come to tears. Whom do you know who is bent against God, for one reason or another? Whom can you think of who resists God’s presence in their life? Begin to pray for them that the compassionate Savior may soften their heart. This takes time, so keep at it and perhaps keep a journal of your prayers. But know that Jesus cares more for their stubborn condition than anyone else and longs to see them restored to hope.

Wednesday

The Punch Lines in this week’s lesson are a beautiful string of pearls that show the beauty of God’s grace and the power of His compassion. If you had to choose one verse from the Punch Lines that you could share with someone who is grieving over the loss of a loved one, which verse would you choose? Why?

Thursday

Take a walk by the cemetery. Read the obituaries in the paper. Watch the news. Notice how death is a real part of our life, and how we fight to avoid it. Although we struggle, we believe that Christ’s work on Calvary and His victorious resurrection take the sting out of death. Find a practical way to keep this promise before you today. Write a verse out and leave it where you can see it.

Friday

As heart-wrenching as the Lazarus story is, even though Lazarus was raised to life, it was only long enough to see His Savior die on Calvary. Imagine how Lazarus must have felt as Jesus was being crucified. What was he thinking? What do you think Mary, Martha, and Lazarus will say in heaven about the seasons of grief they experienced?
flashlight

“It is when Christ is received as a personal Savior that salvation comes to the soul. Zacchaeus had received Jesus, not merely as a passing guest in his home, but as One to abide in the soul temple. The scribes and Pharisees accused him as a sinner, they murmured against Christ for becoming his guest, but the Lord recognized him as a son of Abraham. For ‘they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.’ Gal. 3:7” (The Desire of Ages, p. 556).

Commentary: The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapter 61.

key text

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’

“Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, . . . ’

(Luke 19:8, 9, NIV)
Make a check mark by the things below that you believe are essential for a person to have salvation.

- Attending church every Sabbath
- Confessing sins
- Getting baptized
- Repenting of sins
- Treating others as you wish to be treated
- Reading the Bible and praying every day
- Accepting Christ as your personal Savior
- Participating in Communion
- Volunteering to help “the least of these”
- Being a part of a Christian family
- Witnessing to others about Jesus
- Dressing like a Christian
- Living without sin
- Being born again
- Giving money to the church
- Believing in Jesus

In Jesus’ day, the Jews hated tax collectors for the following reasons:

1. Tax collectors overcharged and could keep the extra money. This was how they got paid. Like most tax collectors in his day, Zacchaeus got very rich by ripping off his own people.

2. Taxes were so high that some people were forced to sell their children into slavery just to pay their taxes.

3. Tax collectors worked for the Romans; thus, their money paid for Roman soldiers and Roman governors. Most Jews hated the Romans who occupied their land, and did not appreciate paying taxes to them. They especially despised Jewish tax collectors such as Zacchaeus, who was a Jew and who had sold out to the Romans for personal profit.

“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

“When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

“All the people saw this and began to mutter, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.’

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.’

“Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.’”

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

“They who are conscious of their own sins have no eyes for the sins of their neighbors.” —Abbot Moses, 10th-century monk.

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah” (Psalm 32:5, NIV).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV).

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NIV).

“I saw a sign on a strip of highway once that I would like to have copied on my gravestone. It said, ‘End of construction. Thank you for your patience.’” —Ruth Bell Graham, poet, writer, and wife of evangelist Billy Graham.

“We serve a God who created our humanity, weeps at the fall of our humanity, became our humanity, and is redeeming our humanity.” —Glenn Stanton, writer, family formation researcher.
Sabbath
Reflect on this statement: “As the floor is swept every day, so is the soul cleansed every day by confession.” Would you agree or disagree? Explain.

Sunday
Think about the radical life transformation of Zacchaeus. He was a different man by simply being in the presence of Jesus. Think of the process of transformation like this: if you want to smell like a caribou (then you need counseling, but besides that), there’s only one way to do it—you need to get up next to a caribou.

Similarly, if you want to be transformed into the character of Christ, or as the apostle Paul puts it, “have the aroma of Christ” (see 2 Corinthians 2:15, NIV), then there’s only one way to do it: get up next to Christ. You can try to be good and emit the fragrance of righteousness—burn your secular CDs, eat tree bark and tofu, never miss church—but your best efforts will still stink like a soiled sock. Remember Isaiah’s words? “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6, NIV).

If you want to radiate the aroma of Jesus and enjoy victory over sin, you must engage in the activity that will produce that smell. For aroma is the inevitable result of activity. So what activities put you into the presence of Christ so that you can be transformed into His likeness?

Monday
Consider the Key Text in the context of Ellen White’s commentary:

“Zacchaeus had been overwhelmed, amazed, and silenced at the love and condescension of Christ in stooping to him, so unworthy. Now love and loyalty to his newfound Master unseal his lips. He will make public his confession and his repentance.

“In the presence of the multitude, ‘Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.’

“When the rich young ruler had turned away from Jesus, the disciples had marveled at their Master’s saying, ‘How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God?’ They had exclaimed one to another, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Now they had a demonstration of the truth of Christ’s words, ‘The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.’ Mark 10:24, 26; Luke 18:27. They saw how, through the grace of God, a rich man could enter into the kingdom” (The Desire of Ages, p. 555).

Tuesday
Read the Flashlight section and ask yourself these questions:

• Is Jesus a “passing guest” or a long-term tenant in the residence of my “soul temple”?

• What would it mean for me to be considered a part of “they which are of faith”?

• How is what others think of me different from how God thinks of me? Which opinion (the opinion of others or the opinion of God) is more important to me? Why?

Wednesday
Read some additional Punch Lines (in parentheses) and rate yourself on each item with a percentage (0% being “None,” 100% being “Yup, that’s me all the time!”).

_____ I seek God first in everything I do. (Matthew 6:33)
_____ Following Christ is my highest desire. (Matthew 16:24)
_____ I love the Lord with all my being. (Matthew 22:37)
_____ I love my neighbor as myself. (Matthew 22:39)
_____ I am a living sacrifice to God. (Romans 12:1, 2)

Thursday
The story of Zacchaeus reminds us that the best way (and really, the only way) to overcome sins such as greed, dishonesty, and so on, is to hang out with Jesus. What would hanging out with Jesus look like in my life? How can I continually live in the presence of Jesus?

Friday
In what ways does my story intersect with the story of Zacchaeus?


*This week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapter 61.

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“Christ delighted in the earnest desire of Mary to do the will of her Lord. He accepted the wealth of pure affection which His disciples did not, would not, understand. The desire that Mary had to do this service for her Lord was of more value to Christ than all the precious ointment in the world, because it expressed her appreciation of the world’s Redeemer. It was the love of Christ that constrained her. The matchless excellence of the character of Christ filled her soul. That ointment was a symbol of the heart of the giver. It was the outward demonstration of a love fed by heavenly streams until it overflowed” (The Desire of Ages, p. 564).

“When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and . . . began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.”

(Luke 7:37, 38, NIV)
Dear God, I worship You because You are __________________. I know that You created me in my mother’s womb. You knit me together and nobody else in the universe has my unique ______________________. Thank You for the blessings You shower upon me. Thank You for _______________. Thank You for _______________. Thank You for _______________. When I think about what an awesome God You are, all I can say is _______________. I am grateful. I love You.
Your child, _____________________.

“Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.’

Jesus answered him, ‘Simon, I have something to tell you.’

‘Tell me, teacher,’ he said.

“Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?’

Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.’

“You have judged correctly,’ Jesus said.

“Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.’

Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’

“The other guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’

“Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’

(Luke 7:36-50, NIV)
punch lines

“The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men’” (Isaiah 29:13, NIV).

“We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12, NIV).

“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. “She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:10, 20, NIV).

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful” (Colossians 4:2, NIV).

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV).

Contrast this story from Luke’s perspective (Luke 7:36-50) with Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-11, and John 11:55-57; 12:1-11. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different? What does this comparison study tell you about each author?

Write one word to describe the following characters in the story:

Jesus: _________________
The Pharisees: _________________
Mary: _________________
Judas: _________________

“What women these Christians have!” —Libanius, 4th-century pagan philosopher.

“Other eyes

“The life of thankful-ness—biblically speaking—is lived in view of the hard things of existence. As the life of thanksgiving deepens, we discover that the more mature prayers of thanksgiving are not those offered for the obvious blessings, but those spoken in gratitude for obstacles overcome, for insights gained, for lessons learned, . . . for opportunities to serve others.” —Fleming Rutledge, The Bible and The New York Times (Eerdmans, 1999).
Her feelings of insignificance didn't stop her:

“I don’t belong there. Those people can offer Jesus more.”

Nothing stopped this woman from showing Jesus love and gratitude in thanks for the new life He offered her. Giving Jesus our best doesn’t always mean material goods. I believe what pleased Jesus more than the gift of perfume was the giver’s heart of love (Whitwer, “Giving Our Best”).

Do you always give your best to Jesus? Or does He get the leftovers of your time, talents, and resources? How can you follow Mary’s example and demonstrate outrageous love toward the Savior?

With that in mind, consider this story: The ornament on my desk this morning caught me by surprise. It wasn’t the usual leftover bulletin. Or a piece of junk mail. Or a tattered Post-it note. No, my Monday morning surprise was a half-eaten graham cracker.

Pasted to the morsel was a Post-it note from the head deacon: “Pastor Karl, This graham cracker was given by a 3-year-old boy for offering today. When I passed him the plate, he dug through his pockets and frowned. Then he looked around the seat—only to discover that he didn’t have any money to give. He reached into his bag, took this out, and proudly announced, “I give this to Jesus!”

Ellen White offers this insight into the story of Mary: “Christ values acts of heartfelt courtesy. . . . He did not refuse the simplest flower plucked by the hand of a child, and offered to Him in love. . . . In the Scriptures, Mary’s anointing of Jesus is mentioned as distinguishing her from the other Marys. Acts of love and reverence for Jesus are an evidence of faith in Him as the Son of God” (The Desire of Ages, p. 564).

Given that “acts of love and reverence for Jesus are evidence of faith in Him,” what have I done lately that demonstrates my faith in Jesus?

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this week’s reading*

The Desire of Ages (or Humble Hero), chapter 62.

A special adaptation of The Desire of Ages, entitled Humble Hero, 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.

www.cornerstoneconnections.net