welcome

Welcome to the experience of teaching from Cornerstone Connections: Real. Solid. Stories.

The following are provided for your assistance:

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A WORD ABOUT WHAT’S AHEAD . . . (student introduction)

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 to 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 into 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 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.

**WHY THE BIBLE STORY APPROACH? (teacher introduction)**

There is a tendency to neglect God’s Word because the Bible seems so old and the issues of life today don’t seem to automatically connect with the ancient, inspired text. Trying to read through the Bible can leave young people in a fog. But the Bible was never meant to be read. It was meant to be studied, reflected on, and integrated into life. It wasn’t written to be analyzed as much as it was to be obeyed. It takes effort. If you simply want a story to entertain you, then the Bible isn’t for you.

The Bible is not a novel that grips you, but if you get a firm hold on the message of the Bible with a teachable heart and an eye that seeks God, you will find something more than entertaining. You will discover a message just for you. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13, NIV). Jesus said, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24, NIV).

The Bible is the tool that will be used by the promised Teacher—the Holy Spirit. We, the earthly teachers, will be effective as we first let the Spirit teach us. Each of these lessons is built around a specific Bible story. You will lead the students *Into the Story* and help them mine truth for their lives *Out of the Story*. The gems of truth are not already mined for you. You and your students will have an opportunity to dig for yourselves.

“In daily study the verse-by-verse method is often most helpful. Let the student take one verse, and concentrate the mind on ascertaining the thought that God has put into that verse for him, and then dwell upon the thought until it becomes his own. One passage thus studied until its significance is clear is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained” (*Education*, p. 189).

Welcome to *Cornerstone Connections*.

—The Editors

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

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

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
what tools are provided for teaching the stories?

(Bolded text helps you review the suggested steps at a glance.)

1. With each lesson in this Teacher’s Guide you will find an Explore section with topics listed that relate to this week’s story. We have provided a variety of resources for exploring the topic you choose—from discussion questions to illustrations, from reader’s theater scripts to learning activities. Use the resources at www.cornerstoneconnections.net to create a “program” that is relevant to your group.

2. Begin the actual “lesson” time with the What Do You Think? activity (and the Did You Know? information) in the student lesson. The activities are designed to get your students to think, respond, and share with one another. The rich discussion that can grow out of this exercise is a great entry point. The key question to ask at the end is “Why did you respond the way you did?”

3. Your Teacher’s Guide provides an illustration, along with a short “bridge” thought that will help you lead your students into the Bible passage itself.

4. The heart of the lesson experience is to read the Bible passage, Into the Story, together and to discuss it with the help of your Out of the Story for Teachers questions. Other passages to compare to this one for further mining in the Word are sometimes provided as well.

5. Then share the information about context and background that will make the story become more understandable for you and your students.

6. You are provided with a short guide to help you unpack the other sections of the student lesson with your class. (Your students are also directed to work through one section of their lesson on their own each day by following the instructions in Making It Real.) Encourage them to do this the week before or the week after you discuss the lesson in class, whichever works best for your teaching situation.

7. Each week’s Teacher’s Guide includes a teaching tip in Rabbi 101 that will be helpful for you to keep for future reference. You are also provided an activity and a summary with which to draw the lesson together and close.

8. In each lesson students are provided with a reference to the volume from the Conflict of the Ages Series by Ellen White that corresponds with the week’s story. Students who choose to will be able to read the entire series in four years by following the reading plan.
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    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapters 18, 19, 20.

11. William Miller (2)
    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapters 21, 22.

12. The Sanctuary
    Scripture Story: Daniel 7; 8:14; Hebrews 8; 9; Leviticus 16.
    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapters 23, 24.

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1. Renewal
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   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 27.

2. Investigative Judgment
   Scripture Story: Daniel 7:9, 10; Revelation 3:5; Zechariah 3.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 28.

3. Lucifer/Satan (1)
   Scripture Story: Ezekiel 28; Isaiah 14; Genesis 3:15.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapters 29, 30.

4. Lucifer/Satan (2)
   Scripture Story: 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:12; James 4:7, 8.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapters 31, 32.

5. State of the Dead
   Scripture Story: Genesis 3:1-5; Psalm 146:4; Isaiah 38:18, 19; Revelation 16:13, 14.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapters 33, 34.

6. Arms of the Papacy
   Scripture Story: Revelation 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 35.

7. Spiritual Challenge
   Scripture Story: Revelation 12:17; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 36.

8. The Bible
   Scripture Story: Isaiah 8:20; 2 Timothy 4:3; Psalm 119:11.
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 37.

9. Last Chance
   Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 38.

10. Time of Trouble
    Scripture Story: Daniel 12:1; Revelation 22:11; Genesis 32:24-30; Psalm 34:7; 91; Revelation 16; 22:11; Hebrews 13:5, 6.
    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 39.

11. Deliverance
    Scripture Story: Daniel 12:1, 2; Revelation 1:7, 7, 14–17; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; John 14:1-4.
    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 40.

12. The End
    Scripture Story: 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 10:1-3, 4-6.
    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 41.

13. The Beginning
    Commentary: The Great Controversy; chapter 42.
Januray

4—Last Words and Witnesses [p. 11]
The last words a person speaks are usually of utmost importance—especially if they know they’re the last words they will speak. Christ’s last words were no different.

The Holy Spirit is one of the greatest gifts that God offers us. But do we see Him as a gift worth receiving?

18—Jesus Only [p. 27]
It was evident when talking with Peter and John that they had spent time with Jesus. Can people say that about us?

25—Dying for a Buck [p. 35]
God calls us to radical authenticity and uncompromising character. Unfortunately, Ananias and Sapphira didn’t heed the call.

February

1—Power. Perseverance. Purpose. [p. 43]
Whether as a religious leader or a teenager, we are empowered by God not only to overcome tribulation, but to develop our giftedness to be used for His glory.

8—The First Christian Martyr [p. 51]
Stephen was brought to court on trumped-up charges, permitted a brief defense, and then executed. Serving God exacted a price then—and it does now.

15—Go the Distance [p. 59]
Saul’s work of destruction was so thorough that Jesus had to arrest him, change his name, and set him on a different road. A road with a purpose.

22—Peter Principles [p. 67]
As demonstrated in Peter’s life, Jesus isn’t looking for perfect people to follow Him. He’s looking for real people who can be changed by His love.

March

1—The Epicenter for Missions [p. 75]
Antioch was the crossroads of the Roman Empire from which God launched His people full throttle into missionary work. But it doesn’t stop there.

8—Us and Them [p. 83]
Tensions arose between the Gentile and Jewish believers. But through sharing stories of how God was working among them, they rekindled the heart of their mission to the world.

15—Belief + Values = Action [p. 91]
Merely believing in the “right” things isn’t enough in this world. We must be firmly grounded in God’s Word in order to make right choices.

22—Hope Against Hope [p. 99]
When we have heard the good news repeatedly, the effect seems to wear off. But where would we be without hope?

29—The Uncool Minority [p. 107]
Paul made some enemies by his preaching. He cut into the sale of idols. But God never said that standing for the right would make us popular.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The last words we speak are usually about the things that are most important, especially if we know that they are in fact the last words we will say. Christ’s final words were strategic: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

In Jerusalem the storied event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ was fresh on the minds of people who lived in the city. It is likely that many of the people who would hear this witness had heard of Jesus. Today there are many within our immediate sphere of influence (“Jerusalem”) that would be brought close to Christ if someone would bear witness.

The problem with taking the gospel to Judea and Samaria was not a matter of distance in miles but the prejudices between Jews and Gentiles. Yet, at the right time, the Holy Spirit accompanied the disciples as they testified to the risen Christ in that region. It is likely that the church has obstacles that only the Holy Spirit can guide us through to reach others beyond the walls of our churches.

And finally, we know more about the ends of the earth than even the disciples were aware of when they ventured out. The key for young people today is to recognize that Christ’s final words on earth were a commission to testify to what we know about Him to everyone.

II. TARGET

www.cornerstoneconnections.net

The students will:

- See the possibilities of their ability to share Christ with others. (Know)
- Feel the urgency to be ready to testify. (Feel)
- Seize every opportunity to convey who Christ is to the world. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Gospel
- Church
- Discipleship

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Invite the students to share their responses to the ranking activity in the What Do You Think? section. The ranking activity challenges young people to choose between a variety of viable good answers. From this exercise you can get a sense of how they feel about their church and its mission. You might go down the list ranking options and ask, “Who chose _____ as their number answer,” and so on. Or, you might simply go around the room and ask each student what their first choice was and why.
Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

One of the most memorable qualities Francis of Assisi had was his ability to teach others to think and live differently by being an example. In fact, he is well known for encouraging others to embrace selfless service and giving simply by modeling it. The story is told of how Francis invited a young monk to accompany him on a journey to the nearby towns to spend the day preaching. The young monk was honored by the opportunity and seized it immediately, fully expecting to get personal training in preaching. As they made their way through towns they walked through the worst parts of those towns, stopping to talk and pray and help those who were in need. All throughout the day he and Francis walked through the streets and the alleys, down the back roads, and even into what we would call the suburbs. They must have stopped and encountered hundreds of people throughout the course of the day. As the sun began to set, Francis and his apprentice headed back home. The young monk reflected as they quietly walked back that they had not once addressed a crowd of people with one sermon. They didn’t even talk to individuals specifically about the gospel. The young man felt somewhat disappointed and asked Francis, “I thought we were going to town to preach! We didn’t even give one sermon or tell anyone about Christ.”

Francis replied, “My son, did you not notice that today we have preached? We were teaching others while we were walking. There were many who watched our every move, whom we stopped to talk to, and how we had time to help others. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk!”

If we are to bear witness to the living Christ, how will we know when to speak and what to say?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Perhaps it has to do with what it means to be a witness. How do you define what a witness is? At the very basic level, a witness is someone who has experienced something and is willing to tell about it. As you read the following story, note that Christ is giving His last words—His final commission to His disciples. And the most important thing He chooses to speak about is how His disciples will become witnesses to the world.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Read the story and underline what you think are the three most important sections of this story? Why?
- Who is this person named Theophilus that the book of Acts is addressed to? How does Luke describe his approach to writing the story of the New Testament church?
- This story contains the final words Christ spoke directly to the disciples before ascending to heaven. Compare these words with His final words in Matthew 28:19, 20.
- Why do you think the disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem for “the promised gift”? What is this gift and what did the disciples know about how they were to function without Christ physically there with them?
- How would you describe/define someone who is a “witness” and what they were to bear witness to?
- Why do you think they were to start first in Jerusalem?
- How is Jerusalem different from Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth?

More Questions for Teachers:

If Jesus were to give you the same commission today, describe what your Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth look like?

- How do you see this commission being fulfilled today?
- How does this story describe what it means to be a disciple?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Acts 9; Acts 3; Luke 19; 2 Kings 7:1-14; 1 Timothy 4:12.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The book of Acts was written by Luke (compare the beginning of Acts with Luke 1) to Theophilus. Nobody really knows who this man was, but the pur-
pose of the account is well documented: it is a continuation of Luke's first Gospel on the life of Christ, but now Luke features the story of the church of Christ, led by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The setting of this lesson is the 40-day period from the time of Christ's resurrection to His ascension into heaven. During those 40 days Jesus sought to clarify His connection to the Old Testament (Hebrew) Scriptures (Luke 24:44-48). It seems as though during this period between the resurrection and the ascension that Jesus would come and go and no one really knew when He would show up. But as the time came for Jesus to ascend into heaven there were several things He wanted the disciples to know:

1. **The disciples must experience the reality of the Resurrection** (Acts 1:3). The reality of our salvation rests on whether Jesus truly was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-40). The theme of the New Testament church is the resurrection of Christ. Calvary was key, but Christ overcoming death is the theme of the book of Acts.

2. **The disciples must understand the Holy Spirit and His relationship to the church** (Acts 1:4, 5). Even Jesus said earlier in His ministry that "he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father" (John 14:12, NASB). That promise had to do with the fact that Christ must go to heaven in the flesh so that the Spirit of Christ could come to every believer—everywhere and all the time (Joel 2:28; Isaiah 44:3; 32:15; John 20:22).

3. **The disciples must embrace the responsibility to become witnesses of Christ** (Acts 1:7, 8). The disciples did not have all the answers, but they knew enough to stake their lives on their testimony that Christ was the Son of God who was crucified and raised to life. Christ ascended to heaven in the flesh, right before their eyes, so that the disciples could also testify of His return.

The sequence of going to Jerusalem first, then to

### Tips for Top-notch Teaching

**Molding by Modeling**

Learning by modeling (as in the example of Francis of Assisi) is by far one of the most underestimated teaching methods of all. Perhaps it is because the technique is subtle, but the principle is foundational. It is easier to get students to think and do something that has been modeled than it is to get them to respond to something you are trying to market. Instead of saying “This week we should try to reach out and share our faith in Christ with a stranger,” we ought to just do it and talk about the experience as it is a reality, not just a good idea. If you want to teach students about forgiveness, get a few to quietly practice it, then share their experiences.

### Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth mirrors a natural course for the church today. One of the tasks of this lesson is to get students to visualize what that might look like today.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

In the middle of the room set a display that has a bit of detail (a bowl of fruit or an arrangement of tools, flowers, or toys). Ask four students to volunteer and have them sit the same distance from the display on all four sides and write a detailed description of what they see in the display. Give them only a couple of minutes to write their descriptions. The rest of the class can do this from where they are sitting as well. Have the four read their descriptions to the class and invite the students to comment on the nuances and differences of each testimony. They all saw the same thing, but saw it from their own perspective. We want students to be encouraged that their testimony of Christ is the objective!

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:

It is masterful to watch how the plan that Christ had to win the world flowed through normal people like you and me. Peter, Mary, James, John, and Lydia were all people not much different than we are today. What caused them to stand out was the story they told about Christ. Today we can begin telling our story right here in our own Jerusalem. Your church, home, and school is that first ring of influence we have in our world. In the second ring we may have to overcome some barriers, break down some prejudices through selfless service, and take some leaps of faith. You can’t go from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth without going to Judea and Samaria! I think the point is to be ready today to share who Christ is to you, no matter what scenario you are in or what it costs. Don’t fear. Christ promised that His Spirit will be with us, and the same Presence of Christ that accompanied the disciples accompanies us today. What do you think might happen if we were to begin praying: “Lord, introduce me to someone today with whom I can share my belief in Christ”? As you pray this prayer regularly, watch how the opportunities emerge. But don’t just watch, respond with your testimony!

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 1, 2, 3.
“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9).

“He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”

(Acts 1:7, 8, NIV)
What do you think is the region that has the greatest need for mission work? (Rank the following in order for the greatest need for gospel work: 1—greatest need, 7—least need.)

- My local church
- My neighborhood
- My school
- Inner cities (urban areas)
- Small towns (rural communities)
- Regions of the world that have large groups of people who can’t read
- Unreached people groups around the world that have no Bible

Why did you rank the above this way? ________________________________

____________________________
____________________________
____________________________
____________________________

Did you know that there are 6,912 languages spoken in the world today? Furthermore, 2,251 of all languages do not have the Bible in their own tongue. One hundred ninety-three million is the number of people who speak the 2,251 languages in which the gospel of Christ has not been translated for them.¹

“**In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.**

He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’

Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’

“He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’”

(Acts 1:1-14, NIV)

punch lines

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20, NASB).

“And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.’ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled” (Mark 5:18-20, NKJV).

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5, NKJV).

“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:11-13, NKJV).

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16, NASB).

“In the midst of a generation screaming for answers, Christians are stuttering.” —Howard Hendricks, American theologian.

“A witness is someone who by explanation and demonstration gives audible and visible evidence of what he has seen and heard without being deterred by the consequences of his actions.” —Stuart Briscoe, Getting Into God, p. 76.
Sabbath
Read and respond to the ranking exercise in the What Do You Think? section of this week's lesson. What do you see as the greatest mission field to witness to? Read the gospel commission given in Matthew 28:19, 20 (see Punch Lines).

As you read this commission, what is your response to Christ's words? How do you see yourself answering this call or fulfilling this command in your life?

Sunday
Read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to guide your study. As you read and respond to the questions, what are some of the key themes that you see in the story? What do you think were some of the emotions that went racing through the disciples as they heard Jesus say these words and then rise up and disappear into the heavens? Are there moments in your life when God calls you to is clear and real? Perhaps there are other times when Jesus seems far away and you are not sure what the next step is. How might this story encourage you in the times when you feel like you don't know what to do?

Monday
The Key Text to memorize this week comes from Acts 1:7, 8 declaring God's plan to communicate His story to the world. Imagine the challenges that faced the disciples as they thought about being witnesses in Jerusalem. What would that cost them? The chief priests and general prejudice against Christ were still very strong. The next phase would be taking the gospel to Judea and Samaria. Already their perceptions of Samaritans were hateful. Who would listen? Why should they care? And how would they be able to take this news about Christ to the ends of the earth? Think about what these three phases of ministry look like today in your world. What phase would you say seems to be the most challenging? Why?

Tuesday
Read the quote from The Acts of the Apostles in the Flashlight section and compare this statement with the perceptions people have about your church. How can your church keep this mission at the forefront of all that you do in your community? Whom do you know in your church who is passionate about witnessing to others? Consider inviting them to share with you how they share their faith with others in such an effective way.

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

Thursday
This week's lesson is about being ready to bear witness to the risen Christ. Being ready to share what Christ means to you is a practical way to be prepared for any opportunity. Your testimony might follow three simple questions: (1) How did you come to know and trust Christ as your personal Savior? (2) Why do you think everyone should choose to become a follower of Christ? (3) What difference does Christ make in your life today? It is important to choose passages of Scripture that support your answers as well. Keep a copy of your testimony in your Bible, and be ready to share it with someone when the opportunity arises.

Friday
Think about some of the experiences you have heard others share that describe how they were able to witness to others about their love for Christ. How does their story impact you? Reflect on the moments you have had a chance to share your faith in Christ with others. How did you experience God leading you to others? How do you think sharing your belief in Christ with someone else strengthens your walk with God?

this week's reading*
The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 1, 2, 3.

*Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.UrRHF1f9O0s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
the Holy Spirit—any takers?


PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
The Holy Spirit is one of the greatest gifts that God offers us, but do we see Him as a gift worth receiving? Do we see the Holy Spirit as a force that works in evangelistic efforts, or perhaps as the voice of our conscience, but nothing more?

In Luke 11:13 Jesus makes the analogy of God as a father giving good gifts to his children. But when the punch line comes, Jesus doesn’t say “This is how God will give you what you want”; He says, “This is how God will give you His Holy Spirit.” It almost seems like a cop-out, doesn’t it? How many other things do we want or need? Perhaps we want good grades, the ability to get into a good school, the gift of good friends, the ability to fit in... So many things seem much more important in a teenager’s life—even in an adult’s life! It almost seems like the beautifully wrapped gift, opened to expose a bag of tube socks.

But that is only if we misunderstand who the Holy Spirit is and what He wants to do in our lives! The Holy Spirit is God Himself, and He wants to lead us into all good things. God created us with the needs and desires we have, and the Holy Spirit will show us how to fulfill those in a lasting, godly way. And when others see that we have something different, they will want to know what the difference is.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Understand the immense gift of the Holy Spirit in their own personal lives. (Know)
• Sense the love God has for them to offer them such a gift. (Feel)
• Choose to ask for the Holy Spirit’s leading in their lives, and tell others why they have something so special. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
• Holy Spirit
• Witnessing/sharing
• Faith
• Spiritual gifts and ministries

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Ask the students to think of the one person they love most in the world. With that one person in mind, ask them the following question: If money weren’t an issue, what would the perfect gift for that person be, and why?

Look at each gift. How big is that gift? Is it lavish, such as a house or an airplane? Is it simple, such as a handwritten letter, or a family heirloom? Is it the gift of time? Why is the gift perfect for that person? How much thought must go into choosing that perfect gift?

God loves us infinitely more than we could ever
love another person. How much more thought must have gone into the gift He offers us?

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

There was a woman who was incredibly difficult to please. She was a tough woman, and raised her three sons with a strong hand. When she got old, her three sons decided it was time to do something nice for their mother.

The young men could not stop arguing over who had bought their mother the best gift. They argued and argued.

“I bought mother a house,” the first son said.
“I bought mother a new car,” the second son said.
“I have you both beat,” said the third son. “Since mother is going blind in her old age, I bought her a parrot that has the entire Bible memorized. She just has to say a text, and the bird will recite it!”

Each young man thought his gift was the finest. Finally, they decided to ask their mother what she thought of the gifts they had bought her.

“Mother,” they said. “Tell us what you thought of our gifts.”

“Joe,” their mother said. “You are a wasteful boy! What did you think I needed with a new house? It’s too big. It costs too much to heat, and it takes forever for me to clean. This was no help at all. I’m an old woman, and I certainly didn’t need a bigger house!”

“What about my gift?” asked the second son.

“Frank,” said the mother. “You certainly don’t think I’m old. I’m blind. I never leave the house. What do I need with a car? I can’t even drive myself!”

“And what about mine?” asked the third brother.

“Harry, you are my favorite!” the old woman exclaimed. “You certainly do know your mother!”

She threw her arms around his neck and said, “The chicken was delicious!”

**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

Sometimes we don’t know the value of the gift we have been given! It might seem ordinary or uninteresting. In fact, the gift of the Holy Spirit seems to be just that. It seems to be something theological, not practical. It doesn’t seem like something that would affect our everyday lives. We couldn’t be more wrong!

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

*After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- What was the physical sign of the Holy Spirit in this story? How would it have felt to see this happen?
- What miracle did the Holy Spirit perform? Why?
- What do you think the Holy Spirit did for them personally and individually?
- What was the reaction of the people watching? What would your reaction have been?

*Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Luke 3:21, 22; 12:9-12; John 20:19-22.*

**Sharing Context and Background**

*Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

The Matthew Henry commentary sheds some light on this story:

He points out that this miracle happened during a feast day that brought Jews from countries far and near to celebrate. This would contribute to maximizing the gospel to all nations, since the miracle of the languages would be more public and its fame would spread sooner and farther.

The Feast of Pentecost, which was being celebrated in Jerusalem at the time of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was a celebration of the law being given on Mount Sinai. Pentecost would now be a benchmark for the gospel as well. Passover took on a second importance with Jesus’ death, and now Pentecost was experiencing the same “doubling up” of significance.

The tongues of fire that rested upon each of the followers of Christ were also highly symbolic. First of all, John the Baptist had declared that Jesus would baptize them with the Spirit and fire. This is an example of that: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit paired with the tongues of fire that appeared over their heads. We are reminded of God’s appearance to Moses in the burning bush. It was there that He declared His name: I AM Who I AM. The law, celebrated at Pentecost, was given in fire on Mount Sinai. Even Ezekiel (in 1:13) had his mission confirmed with a vision of burning coals. Isaiah’s mission was confirmed with a coal of fire touching his lips (Isaiah 6:7). Sin finally will be destroyed in a lake of fire, and the earth will be purified with fire. Our characters are said to be purified like
metal in fire. Fire is a very important symbol both before and after Christ’s ministry, showing the continuity of what Christ was teaching.

Matthew Henry makes a connection between the dividing of tongues at the Tower of Babel and the dividing of tongues of fire at Pentecost. He suggests that at the Tower of Babel the dividing of tongues separated people and made it difficult for the true worship of God to continue with those who had already set it aside. However, with the dividing of the tongues of fire at Pentecost (and with the subsequent miracle of languages) people from nations far and near were brought back together through the Holy Spirit.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Ask the students to think of one gift that God has given them. What do they do with that gift? With the blessing of the Holy Spirit, what limits are possible with that gift?

For example, perhaps one student enjoys writing. What do they do with that gift? Perhaps they write poetry, or contribute to the school paper. What could the Holy Spirit do with that gift if they would ask Him? Perhaps that student could become a great writer for God, given even more talent than they could imagine because of God’s special blessing. Encourage the class to think big!

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:
The Holy Spirit was promised to us long, long ago. God has not forgotten His promise, and we can still claim that gift. The problem is that many people don’t see the value in the gift of the Holy Spirit. It seems boring or theological. People don’t see how it could fit into their lives. They don’t see what the Holy Spirit is offering to them personally. He is not offering overblown church services with people falling down in a faint. He

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
is offering courage, wisdom, discretion, contentment, and a sense of one's purpose on this earth.

The Holy Spirit is given to us to help us gain all those things we crave. The Holy Spirit will lead us into joy and contentment. He will also give us the courage to stand up and say where our happiness comes from. We don’t need to preach. We just need to tell our own stories. There is no better sermon than a happy, successful young person saying “My life is different because of God.”
It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 51).

“Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

(Acts 2:2-4, NIV)
what do you think?

In Luke 11:13 Jesus made the analogy of God being our Father.

1. He said if we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God be willing to give us the Holy Spirit. How do you feel about this?
   - ___ Disappointed
   - ___ Apathetic
   - ___ Angry
   - ___ Excited
   - ___ Contented

2. When Jesus talked about parents giving “good gifts,” does it disappoint you that Jesus would then offer the gift of the Holy Spirit?
3. What does the Holy Spirit give you that you did you know?

   In gift-giving, there is something called the “deadweight cost,” a term coined by Joel Waldofgel, an economics professor at the University of Pennsylvania. When you spend $50 on a present, the person receiving the present does not necessarily value the gift at the $50 you spent. They might see the item in the store and think, “That’s not worth $50! I wouldn’t spend more than $20!” That is a $30 deadweight loss. How much do we value the gift of the Holy Spirit?

   “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

   “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cre- tans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’

   “Some, however, made fun of them and said, ‘They have had too much wine.’

   “Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: . . . ‘God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”’ Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.’

   “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

   “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.’”

   (Acts 2:1-14, 32-39, NIV)
punch lines

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19, NIV).

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matthew 3:11, NIV).

“That his people recalled the days of old, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them?” (Isaiah 63:11, NIV).

“And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5, NIV).

“His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Luke 1:67, NIV).

“What did the Holy Spirit do for the disciples?”

“How did the people respond to Peter’s sermon?”

“Do you think the disciples felt they had gained something personally from the Holy Spirit, or only something to use for helping others?”

“The people who witnessed the result of this great outpouring of the Holy Spirit had different reactions. What were they?”

“If you had been a witness of this event, how would you have reacted? Would you have joked? Would you have taken it seriously?”

“What did Peter say the people needed to do in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Why do you think that’s important?”

“Other eyes

“The greatest gift is a portion of thyself.” —Ralph Waldo Emerson, 19th-century American poet.

“And every gift from a friend is a wish for your happiness.” —Richard Bach, American writer, author of Jonathan Livingston Seagull (1936).

“Our generation has nobody home in the universe, nobody at all. Eventually, let us understand this: only a personal comforter can comfort man who is personal, and only one Comforter is great enough, the infinite-personal God who exists, that is the God of Judeo-Christian Scripture. Only He is the sufficient Comforter.” —Francis Schaeffer, 20th-century American theologian.
Monday

In the Key Text we see the Holy Spirit giving them the gift of speaking foreign languages. We don’t always have the need for foreign languages in our day-to-day lives, but we do have the need to communicate with people we might otherwise not be able to connect with. Do you ever find it uncomfortable talking to older people? Are there groups of kids at school that you just “don’t get”? People don’t have to come from different countries to speak foreign languages to each other. The Holy Spirit is able to bridge those gaps and be a translator between people. God wants us to be able to understand each other and to connect with each other. How else can someone see God in you and want what you have? Ask God to give you the gift of “foreign languages” today!

Tuesday

Sometimes Christians make the mistake of believing that in order to truly be a Christian, they have to experience some sort of rapturous experience, falling down or speaking in an unknown language while in a trance. This couldn’t be further from the truth! Being a Christian is a lot more “everyday life” than that. We have to believe in Jesus, love Him, and do our best to follow Him. In what “everyday” ways can you trust God today?

Wednesday

Have you ever felt awkward asking God for the Holy Spirit? Why? What feels odd about it? God has promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit. He gives us gifts that will fulfill our deepest desires and bring us lasting happiness. God knows them. God created you with particular needs, and He wants you to turn to Him to meet those needs. When God promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit, we should know that the Holy Spirit will both make us a blessing to others and bless us, too! What are your deepest desires? Are you ready to see what God has been saving for you?

Thursday

Does the Holy Spirit work only in evangelistic events and at Bible studies? Is the Holy Spirit interested only in the unconverted, or is He interested in you, too? What ways do you think the Holy Spirit would like to be involved in your everyday life?

Sunday

When God poured out the Holy Spirit, His people began to do amazing things! Those who saw them reacted in some very different ways. Some were shocked and started to think: Had Jesus truly been the Son of God? Had they been wrong? Others turned into jokers: “They’re drunk!” People often make fun of things they don’t understand. Have you ever been made fun of for being different? Do you laugh at those you don’t understand? Why or why not?

Romans 5:5 tells us that the Holy Spirit puts God’s love into our hearts, giving us hope. What do you hope for in the future? What is your deepest desire?

Many people long for a loving, lasting relationship here on earth. We know that we can have that kind of relationship with God, but it doesn’t take away our human need for companionship. How can doing it God’s way give us happiness that will last for the rest of our lives?

Why would you personally want the Holy Spirit? What benefit is there for you?


this week’s reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 4, 5.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The story of Peter and John healing the crippled beggar provides a great launching pad for spiritual conversations on a variety of topics. This healing story is followed with an explanation that Peter preached to the onlookers. Soon the Sanhedrin got involved and before they knew it, Peter and John landed in jail.

The prison gave Peter the opportunity to testify about Jesus. He explained, “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:8-12, NIV).

Regardless of what direction you go with this lesson, it is ultimately about Jesus. A natural emphasis for this Bible passage might be on outreach and service. Keep in mind that the whole narrative is triggered by a service project that John and Peter did for the lame man. Of course, the miracle of healing was performed in the name and power of Christ. Another highlight that merits emphasis is the importance of witnessing. The text provides an ideal case study in how we ought to share our faith. After all, the witnessing in the story is based solely on Jesus—His death, resurrection, and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit.

In presenting this lesson, take your cues from Peter and John—just keep on talking about Jesus. May it be said of you, as it was said of them, “and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV).

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Hear the story of men who changed the world through Christ living in them. (Know)
• Sense the compassion that Jesus feels for all of His children. (Feel)
• Be challenged to share the story of Jesus with people who do not know Him. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Calvary
• Outreach and service
• How to witness

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

As an alternate activity, use this scenario:
Divide your class into small groups. Give each
group the assignment of designing a seminar entitled “How to Share Christ Without Being a Weirdo.” Each group should brainstorm a list of as many ideas as possible. Then have the students share their lists with the whole class while you keep a master list. Put an asterisk next to the ideas that at least some people in the class would be willing to implement in the week ahead.

Illustration

In January 2008 a news story hogged the headlines about a 15-year-old girl in Australia named Demi-Lee Brennan. Brennan became the world’s first-known transplant patient to change blood types from O negative to O positive, taking on the immune system of her organ donor. Initially, the doctors assumed someone had made a mistake, because the assumption has always been that a change like that can’t happen. Now Demi-Lee is dubbed a “one-in-six-billion miracle.”

The blood stem cells in Brennan’s new liver invaded her body’s bone marrow, taking over her entire immune system. She now has an entirely different kind of blood—blood that welcomes life, rather than carrying death. “It’s like my second chance at life,” Demi-Lee says.1

The story is one of good news—for Demi-Lee and many others! The rare phenomenon now means that she no longer has to take a cocktail of antirejection drugs for the rest of her life. She is now a healthy teenager who displays no signs of her ordeal—other than the scar on her body.

Moreover, the success in her procedure gives hope to the 1,800 desperate Australians awaiting a similar transplant. The story is now the subject of medical research being conducted around the globe. Former head of Westmead’s liver transplant unit, Dr. Stuart Dorney, comments: “We now need to go back over everything that happened to Demi and see why, and if, it can be replicated.”2

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Demi-Lee’s story is not unlike your story and mine. We too have been offered a blood transplant—at Calvary. Now our Savior, Jesus Christ, bears the scar of our healing. Consequently, when we put our faith in Jesus, He gives us life eternal. And that is the good news!

Our lesson today tells about a miracle of healing. But it is really about much more than just the healing of the lame man that Peter and John performed in God’s Spirit. This story is our story of where we too can find life—in Jesus! It is a story we’ve got to share with others. Our lives depend on it.

The lesson this week focuses on Peter. This is the same apostle who wrote a letter to Christians and described the world as full of “debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry” (1 Peter 4:3, NIV). Then he adds, “Of course, your old friends don’t understand why you don’t join in with the old gang anymore. But you don’t have to give an account to them. They’re the ones who will be called on the carpet—and before God himself. Listen to the Message. It was preached to those believers who are now dead, and yet even though they died (just as all people must), they will still get in on the life that God has given in Jesus” (1 Peter 4:4-6, Message).

Who doesn’t want in on “the life that God has given in Jesus”? Sure, we may not fit into this world, but who cares? Life with Jesus is the best way to live.

Peter practiced what he preached. He was not intimidated in the least by the authorities that interrogated him for healing a crippled man. Then they threw Peter in jail for witnessing about Jesus. But He was happy to “stick out” from the crowd for Christ!

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• The lame man begged for money, but Peter gave him something much more valuable—the use of his legs. Have you ever asked God for help in a small matter, only to be surprised by a much grander answer to prayer than you could have imagined? If so, share your story with the rest of the class. Next, discuss the pros and cons of this suggestion when it comes to prayer: “Ask God for what you want, but don’t be surprised when He gives you what you really need.”

• Note that the lame man went “into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.” Think about what it is that people get really excited about in our culture today. Concerts? Yes. Football games? Absolutely. Political rallies? Sure. Church? Not so much. Why do you suppose that is? Is it possible or even desirable to try to replicate this lame man’s excitement in church?

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
• Acts 3:10 tells us that people “were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened” to the lame man. Would you characterize what is happening today in the church as something that sparks “wonder and amazement” in onlookers? Why or why not? Are these same kinds of miracles possible today? If so, why do they occur so rarely?
• How do you respond when people grill you with questions about your faith? What can you learn from the way Peter responded to the leaders of the Sanhedrin?
• Acts 4:13 speaks of the “courage of Peter and John.” When it comes to witnessing for Jesus, what might “courage” look like for you?

Sharing Context and Background
Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

In the ancient world it was often the custom for beggars to sit at the entrance to the Temple. This was a strategic location because when people are on their way to worship God they are disposed to showing compassion to those in need. So this scene of Peter and John going to the Temple at the customary time of prayer (3:00 p.m.) and encountering a crippled beggar was a familiar one. What followed, of course, was anything but ordinary.

Peter commanded the lame man, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6, NIV). In other words, Peter was saying “by the authority of Jesus . . .” This healing occurred through the power of the Holy Spirit, not their own.

This miracle attracted a crowd, so Peter capitalized on the opportunity to share Jesus Christ. Notice that Peter clearly presented his message by who Jesus is, how the Jews rejected Him, why this rejection was deadly, and how they needed to respond to set things right with God. Peter shared a message of hope, emphasizing that it was not too late to accept Jesus as their Messiah and Lord.

Peter then called them to repentance: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus” (Acts 3:19, 20, NIV). Note that the result of repentance is that God will bless you with a time of “refreshing.” As Hosea put it, “Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth” (Hosea 6:3, NIV). Would you like to be refreshed? It is possible through repentance.

Peter and John then were called to testify before the Jewish council, which was comprised of “the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law” (Acts 4:5, NIV). This was the same council that had condemned Jesus to death (see Luke 22:66). It had 70 members plus the high priest. The majority of the group were Sadducees. They were influential and wealthy men of Jerusalem who did not believe in the Resurrection. Thus, they were highly offended by Peter

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Teaching From . . .
Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Teaching by Example

While it might be helpful to Google “Teaching tips for instructing students how to share their faith,” the most powerful way to teach on this topic is to live an intentionally evangelistic life. You can use the most advanced teaching techniques in the world, but if you’re not actually an active witness for Christ yourself, your teaching will fall flat. And make no mistake—students can sniff a fraud a mile away. So the best way to inspire students with the topic of this lesson is to bring someone you have led to Christ and let them share their testimony. Ask your friend to tell of the difference Jesus has made in their life. And don’t be surprised when your students take note that you and your saved friend have been with Jesus!

and John, who “were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 4:2, NIV).

Nevertheless, members of the council were amazed because they knew Peter and John to be unschooled and yet they noticed what being with Jesus had done for these two disciples (Acts 4:13). Seeing the difference that Jesus makes in a person’s life is at the heart of the most powerful testimonies.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Challenge your students to practice servant evangelism during the week. Just like Peter and John began with an act of service before they witnessed for Christ, we too can spark spiritual interest by sharing the love of Christ through selfless acts of service.

Check out the Web site www.servant evangelism.com/ideas/search_ideas.php for hundreds of servant evangelism ideas.

Share the following story and discuss with your students the similarities between this story and the story of Peter healing the crippled beggar.

Matthew Parris is a newspaper columnist for The Times of London and a self-described atheist. Nevertheless, in a December 2008 column he wrote an article titled “As an Atheist, I Truly Believe Africa Needs God.” Parris admits that saying this runs counter to his beliefs, but he cannot ignore the difference that he sees in African Christians. Parris, who grew up in Africa, writes:

“Before Christmas I returned, after 45 years, to the country that as a boy I knew as Nyasaland. Today it’s Malawi. . . . It inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in development charities. But traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief, too—one I’ve been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I’ve been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God.

“Now a confirmed atheist, I’ve become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa. . . . It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.”

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Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapter 6.
Jesus only

“As the priests listened to the apostles’ fearless words, ‘they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.’

“Of the disciples after the transfiguration of Christ it is written that at the close of that wonderful scene ‘they saw no man, save Jesus only.’ Matthew 17:8. ‘Jesus only’—in these words is contained the secret of the life and power that marked the history of the early church. When the disciples first heard the words of Christ, they felt their need of Him. They sought, they found, they followed Him” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 64).

keytext

“And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”

(Matthew 17:8, KJV)
Number the following methods of sharing Christ from most effective (1) to least effective (10).

1. Preaching on a busy street corner.
2. Going door to door with a survey about spiritual matters
3. Inviting a friend to church
4. Living a good life through example
5. Going on a mission trip
6. Wearing clothes that display a Christian message
7. Bringing a friend to church
8. Giving a speech in class about my faith
9. Hanging out with friends who are spiritual
10. Handing out gospel pamphlets

According to Barna Research Online: “Half of Americans believe the Christian faith no longer has a lock on people’s hearts. Overall, 50 percent of the adults interviewed agreed that Christianity is no longer the faith that Americans automatically accept as their personal faith, while just 44 percent disagreed and 6 percent were not sure.”


“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

‘Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.”

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“The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest’s family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: ‘By what power or what name did you do this?’

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.” Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

(Acts 3:1-10; 4:5-13, NIV)
“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he” (Isaiah 43:10, NIV).

“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (Revelation 2:10, NIV).

“When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God of Heaven’s Armies” (Jeremiah 15:16, NLT).

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

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (Mark 1:17, NIV).

“God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.”—George Whitefield, 18th-century Anglican itinerant minister.

“You can become a Christian by going to church just about as easily as you can become an automobile by sleeping in a garage.”—Garrison Keillor, American author, humorist, radio personality.
Sabbath

Survey some of the members in your church and ask them how they came to faith. Look for a consistent theme in the stories. Did they come to know Christ through the influence of a friend? family member? pastor? teacher? evangelist? What was it about the witness that was effective?

Further reflect on your own spiritual story. Who has been a witness for Christ in your life? What methods of evangelism do you respond to best? Why?

Sunday

Read the sections Into the Story and Out of the Story. Think about two key verses in the Bible reading and consider the questions that follow:

“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you.”
- Do you find it easier to offer God money or yourself? Why?
- What is it that you can offer to friends who may be spiritually crippled?
- Would Peter’s witness have been as effective without this healing? Explain. In what ways can serving others enhance evangelism today?

“They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”
- Who comes to mind when you think of someone who spends a lot of time with Jesus?
- Ask yourself: How does spending time with Jesus change me?
- True or false: If you spend time with Jesus you can’t help witnessing to others. Explain your answer.

Monday

In referencing the Key Text, Ellen White comments: “‘they saw no man, save Jesus only.’ Matthew 17:8. ‘Jesus only’—in these words is contained the secret of the life and power that marked the history of the early church” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 64).

Is the same “life and power” of Peter and John available to us today? How might we access that power? Should we expect, then, to heal the lame like the apostles did in the early church? If we fail to perform such miracles are we then not connected to Jesus? Explain.

Tuesday

Read this week’s Flashlight. Compile a list of specific ways you can live by the mantra “Jesus only.”

Wednesday

Read the verses in Punch Lines. Choose one that speaks pointedly to your life today. Why does this text stand out to you now? Think about how you can put that text into practice today.

Thursday

How does a personal encounter with Christ at Calvary affect how you will live today?

Friday

Ellen White offers insight on the conversion of Peter.

“When the following the healing of the cripple, Annas and Caiaphas, with the other dignitaries of the temple, met together for the trial, and the prisoners were brought before them. In that very room and before some of those very men, Peter had shamefully denied his Lord. This came distinctly to his mind as he appeared for his own trial. He now had an opportunity of redeeming his cowardice.

“Those present who remembered the part that Peter had acted at the trial of his Master, flattered themselves that he could now be intimidated by the threat of imprisonment and death. But the Peter who denied Christ in the hour of His greatest need was impulsive and self-confident, differing widely from the Peter who was brought before the Sanhedrin for examination. Since his fall he had been converted. He was no longer proud and boastful, but modest and self-distrustful. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and by the help of this power he was resolved to remove the stain of his apostasy by honoring the name he had once disowned” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 62, 63).

What will it take for God to shape you into a bold witness for Him—just as He did for Peter?


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this week’s reading*


dying for a buck

Key Text: Acts 5:1, 2.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

One of the most compelling snapshots of generosity in the Bible is found in Acts 4:32-36. Following that poignant picture of God’s people “sharing everything they had” and giving “to anyone as he had need” is the unsettling story of Ananias and Sapphira. The juxtaposition of the narratives is jolting to say the least.

Ellen White offers insightful commentary on both stories. Speaking of the generosity in the early Christian church she writes: “This liberality on the part of the believers was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. The converts to the gospel were ‘of one heart and of one soul.’ One common interest controlled them—the success of the mission entrusted to them; and covetousness had no place in their lives. Their love for their brethren and the cause they had espoused was greater than their love of money and possessions” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 70, 71).

Referring then to the story of Ananias and Sapphira, Ellen White comments: “In sharp contrast to the example of benevolence shown by the believers was the conduct of Ananias and Sapphira, whose experience, traced by the pen of Inspiration, has left a dark stain upon the history of the early church” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 71).

This lesson offers extreme examples from Scripture of both hypocrisy and integrity. You cannot escape the radical calling of authenticity and God’s uncompromising character in this story. So present the story and let the students grapple with the gritty and messy dissonance in the text. You might just read the passage, and a lively discussion about integrity, hypocrisy, and giving is likely to follow.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Be exposed to the best and worst of the early Christian church. (Know)
• Grapple with the seriousness of God’s judgment. (Feel)
• Be challenged to live a life of integrity and generosity. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Integrity
• Hypocrisy
• Giving

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

As an alternate activity, use this scenario:

Play the old game “Two Truths and a Lie.” Have the students write three statements about themselves, two that are true and one that is not. If the kids choose
two truths that sound like lies and a lie that sounds true, they'll be able to fool the group. The group must try to guess which one of the three is a lie.

Another option is to host a lying contest. Have each student fabricate a lie and then vote on the best tall tale. Give a prize to the winner, or promise $10 to the winner—then later admit that you lied!

Illustration

John D. Rockefeller, Sr., at the age of 23 was a millionaire. By 50, he was a billionaire and dubbed the “richest man in the world.”

But Rockefeller was a miserable rich man. In his quest to amass a fortune, he sacrificed his health. At 53, his body was riddled with disease and ulcers.

Doctors gave him less than a year to live. At the root of his ill health was Rockefeller’s attitude. He was a grabber, not a giver. His all-consuming greed proved destructive. The man who could buy any restaurant in the world with pocket change was limited to a diet of milk and crackers.

During that crisis John D. Rockefeller reevaluated his life. He said, “I have all these possessions and yet I’ve never been a giver.” That’s when he decided to give much of it away. He gave to churches, hospitals, and medical research. Why not? He was going to die in a year anyway. What good would all his money do him then? Why not invest in something that would outlive him?

Today, many significant discoveries in medicine are the result of money given by the Rockefeller Foundation. Most significant, however, was the healing impact Rockefeller’s giving had on himself. When he focused on giving rather than getting, his ill health dramatically improved. His generosity proved therapeutic.

John D. Rockefeller lived to the age of 90.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Jesus taught this principle long ago: “Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you” (Luke 6:38, NCV).

Giving is therapeutic. The more we give, the more we benefit. What do you see as the primary benefits of giving?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following questions to process it with them.

• Acts 4:32-35—Make a list of any similarities and differences that you see between the early Christian church described in this passage and your church today. How well would you have fit into the early church? How easy is it for you to share with others? What barriers to generosity do you see in our world today? How might God use you this week to reach out to someone in need?

• Acts 4:36, 37—What is your nickname? How did you get the name? Is there something about your nickname that expresses a truth about who you are? Joseph is best known by his nickname—“The encourager.” What is it about Joseph in verses 36 and 37 that merits a name like “the encourager”? Who is the most encouraging person you know? Explain. Who could use some encouragement today? What does God want you to do about it?

• Acts 5:1-11—Does God’s punishment of Ananias and Sapphira seem too severe to you? Why or why not? How would “great fear” be used by God in the early church? What do you think the members of the early church learned from God’s judgment of Ananias and Sapphira? If you had been one of the pall bearers at that funeral how do you think you’d have felt toward God? Why? What can we learn about the fear of the Lord in this story? How can you apply this in your life today?

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

William Barclay offers this commentary on the story of Ananias and Sapphira:

“This is one of the stories which demonstrate the almost stubborn honesty of the Bible. It might well have been left out because it shows that even in the early church there were very imperfect Christians; but the Bible refuses to present an idealized picture of anything. Once a court painter painted the portrait of Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was disfigured by warts upon his face. The painter, thinking to please the great
man, omitted the disfiguring warts. When Cromwell saw the picture, he said, ‘Take it away, paint me warts and all.’ It is one of the great virtues of the Bible that it shows us its heroes, warts and all.

“There is a certain encouragement in the story, for it shows us that even in its greatest days the church was a mixture of good and bad.”

In Acts 5:1–8:3 we see both internal and external problems ravaging the early church. Inside there were dishonesty (5:1-11) and administrative problems (6:1-7). Externally, the church was being persecuted. Nevertheless, leaders stayed focused on what mattered the most—spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This story is a reminder that the evil one was alive and active in the early church. Still today the church is under attack (see Ephesians 6:12; 1 Peter 5:8). While Satan’s fate was sealed at the cross, it will not be fully realized until Jesus comes again (see Revelation 20:10).

The sin that Ananias and Sapphira committed was not frugality or withholding money—it was their decision whether or not to sell the land and then how much of the money to donate. Their sin was lying to God and to His people—claiming they gave the whole amount while keeping some back for themselves, thus appearing to be more generous than they really were.

Still today, dishonesty, greed, and covetousness will destroy God’s church. All lies are evil, but when we lie to try to deceive God and His church, we seriously compromise our witness for Christ.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Conclude by asking what the benefits are of being a giver. How are others impacted by their generosity? How does giving change the giver? What happens when giving people give too much? Or when the takers take too much? Talk about balancing giving with taking. Discuss ways your Sabbath School can model the generosity of the early church.

Summary

Share the following story and discuss with your students how it illustrates the principles of this lesson.

Wayne Cordeiro, pastor of New Hope Christian Fellowship O‘ahu in Honolulu, Hawaii, writes:

Some time ago some wonderful people in our church gave Anna, my wife, and me a dinner certificate to a nice restaurant for $100. We thought, Wow, a hundred bucks. Let’s go for it. We found a free evening. We dressed up . . . I even washed and waxed my car, because we wanted to take it through the valet, and I didn’t want my Ford Pinto to look bad. The night came, and we were excited.

We went to this ritzy restaurant and walked in. They gave us a nice, candlelit table overlooking a lagoon adjacent to a moonlit bay there in Hawaii. Oh, it was nice . . .

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Experiential Learning**

Jesus’ teaching that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35) is true—especially for young people. But how can you teach this truth in a way that it sticks and shapes generous kids?

Students are usually on the receiving end—they get food, clothing, education, and so on just given to them. Give them a chance to step outside the receiving role, however, and they learn the satisfaction of being the generous one, and they vibrate with joy. They feel grown up. It empowers them.

If you are serious about teaching your students generosity, you must make the experience their own. Take, for example, the typical food drive at the local school. Too often Mom or Dad throws some extra cans in the cart and the kids deliver the goods at school. It’s a good start, but the kids aren’t really participating in the process. All they’re doing is delivering your purchase to the school.

The difference between Dad’s $10 and the kids’ $10 is the difference between watching generosity and learning generosity experientially. Let the students decide how they want to respond to what this lesson teaches. Encourage them to dream about aiding the homeless or funding a well in Africa or giving money to a needy family in the church—and then let them pay for it!

When the bill came, I said, “Honey, why don’t you give me the certificate.”

She said, “I don’t have the certificate. I thought you brought it.”

I said, “You have to have it. You’re supposed to have it. You’re the wife!”

She said, “I don’t have it.” And I thought, *We are in deep yogurt. Here we are. We look rich, we act rich, we even smell rich. But if we don’t have that certificate, it invalidates everything.*

There are times in our lives when we can look holy, we can act holy, we can smell holy. But without a relationship with the Lord, we’ve forgotten something. It’s relationship that validates everything else.²

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dying for a buck

flashlight

“In the case of Ananias and Sapphira, the sin of fraud against God was speedily punished. The same sin was often repeated in the after history of the church and is committed by many in our time. But though it may not be attended by the visible manifestation of God’s displeasure, it is no less heinous in His sight now than in the apostles’ time. The warning has been given; God has clearly manifested His abhorrence of this sin; and all who give themselves up to hypocrisy and covetousness may be sure that they are destroying their own souls” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 76).

keytext

“No a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

(Acts 5:1, 2, NIV)
the best policy.

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_ ____ T ruth is

_ _ _ _ A student can do well in school without cheating.

_ _ _ _ A t h l e t e s  c a u g h t  c h e a t i n g  i n  s p o r t s  s h o u l d  b e

_ _ _ _ I f  y o u  w a n t  t o  s u c c e e d  i n  l i f e ,  y o u ' l l  h a v e  t o  b e  a  l i t t l e

_ _ _ _ It is possible to lie by saying nothing.

_ _ _ _ P e o p l e  c a n ' t  b e  t r u e  f r i e n d s  i f  t h e y  a r e  n o t

_ _ _ _ Everybody cheats a little.

_ _ _ _ Honesty pays.

"There’s a fair amount of cheating going on, and students aren’t all that concerned about it,” says Donald McCabe, a professor of management and global business at New Jersey-based Rutgers [University].

"The professor has been surveying cheating practices among college kids for 18 years and high school students for six years. . . . His findings?

Sixty-four percent of students report one or more instances of serious testing-cheating, which include copying from someone else, helping someone else cheat on a test, or using crib notes or cheat notes, McCabe says.”

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“What is more, he was chosen by the churches to accompany us as we carry the offering, which we administer in order to honor the Lord himself and to show our eagerness to help. We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man” (2 Corinthians 8:19-21, NIV).

“But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them” (Deuteronomy 15:7, NLT).

“If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!” (Proverbs 19:17, NLT).

“Don’t love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, ‘I will never fail you. I will never abandon you’” (Hebrews 13:5, NLT).

“Jesus told him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me’” (Matthew 19:21, NLT).

“Live so that you wouldn’t be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.”—Will Rogers, 19th-20th-century American actor, writer, and speaker.

“Things themselves do not remain, but their effects do. Therefore we should not be mean and calculating with what we have but give with a generous hand. Look at how much people give to players and dancers—why not give just half as much to Christ?”—John Chrysostom, 4th-century archbishop of Constantinople.
Sabbath
Review your answers in the What Do You Think? section. Circle the statements that you are 100 percent sure about in the answer that you gave. Underline the statements that you could argue an answer of “Yes” or “No.”

Sunday
Underline everything in the Into the Story section that teaches about integrity, hypocrisy, and giving. From the text, what can we learn about integrity?

What can we learn about hypocrisy?

What can we learn about giving?

Monday
Read the Key Text and consider these questions:
• Were Ananias and Sapphira required to sell the property and lay all the money at the feet of the apostles?
• What sin did they commit?
• Did their sin merit such stern punishment? Why or why not?

Tuesday
Reflect on the comments of Ellen White that come just before her statements in the Flashlight section:

*Let truth telling be held with no loose hand or uncertain grasp. Let it become a part of the life. Playing fast and loose with truth, and dissembling to suit one’s own selfish plans, means shipwreck of faith. ‘Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.’ Ephesians 6:14. He who utters untruths sells his soul in a cheap market. His falsehoods may seem to serve in emergencies; he may thus seem to make business advancement that he could not gain by fair dealing; but he finally reaches the place where he can trust no one. Himself a falsifier, he has no confidence in the word of others” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 76).

Wednesday
Read the verses in Punch Lines. Determine the key point in each verse. Then write one sentence that captures the core idea of all the texts.

Thursday
How trustworthy am I? How can I nurture the trust that others put in me? How can I build my trust in God? How can I foster God’s trust in me?

Friday
Marilee Jones, dean of admissions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), resigned after admitting the résumé she submitted 28 years earlier for an entry level position in the admissions department was filled with lies. According to her résumé Jones had attended and graduated from Albany Medical College, Union College, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute—three well-respected schools in New York. In truth, she attended only Rensselaer as a part-time student for just one school year!

“I misrepresented my academic degrees when I first applied to MIT 28 years ago and did not have the courage to correct my résumé when I applied for my current job or at any time since,” Ms. Jones said in a statement posted on MIT’s Web site. “I am deeply sorry for this and for disappointing so many in the MIT community and beyond who supported me, believed in me, and who have given me extraordinary opportunities.”

Since Ms. Jones took the position of dean of admissions in 1997, she has widely been considered a guru in the field. She is the author of several books, including Less Stress, More Success, in which she writes: “Holding integrity is sometimes very hard to do because the temptation may be to cheat or cut corners. But just remember that ‘what goes around comes around,’ meaning that life has a funny way of giving back what you put out.”

Ask yourself:
• Is there something from Ms. Jones’s story that I should learn?
• Are there any compromises in my life that will come back to bite me?
• How can I live with nothing to hide?


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this week’s reading*

*Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.U8rHf1f600s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
I. SYNOPSIS

God has a purpose for everything. Even our problems serve to benefit us if we confront them with the right attitude and adequate preparation. God could have saved Peter and John from flogging, kept Paul and Silas out of jail, and prevented Daniel from being thrown into the lions’ den. Yet, He didn’t. And as a result, every one of them deepened their relationship with God.

This lesson aims to help young people recognize that God not only empowers them to overcome tribulation, but has planted seeds of potential that if attended to appropriately can develop into purposeful skills and talents to be used for His glory.

Ellen White reiterates this in her writings:

“What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered persecution for Christ’s sake? It was union with God, union with the Holy Spirit, union with Christ” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 85).

“The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work proved a great blessing to the church” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 89).

Our students can make a difference today—in our churches and in their worlds. They are gifted, they are empowered, and God wants to use them. In this lesson they’ll be encouraged to be open to how God wants to use them today.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Understand that not only their strengths serve a purpose, but even their problems and weaknesses can. (Know)
• Desire to be constantly tapped into God’s power. (Feel)
• Be challenged to discover their spiritual gifts; finding avenues to apply and develop them. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Perseverance/suffering
• Purpose
• Character building/transformation in Christ
• Gifts and talents

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Beforehand, prepare cards or decorative notepapers. Instruct students to write notes of encouragement to someone they know who is going through a difficult time. Alternatively, if any of your students are currently feeling discouraged or overwhelmed, encourage them to write notes of encouragement to themselves.

If they absolutely cannot think of anyone to write a
note to, have them write to an imaginary friend.

If it’s possible, have your students share what they have written with the class. Plan to make time at the end of the session to pray for the people mentioned here.

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

For this illustration, prepare the following items: flashlight, batteries for flashlight, table lamp.

Bring out a flashlight that has no batteries in it. How useful is it? What does it need?

(Give the students time to share their answers with the class.)

Put the batteries in. Now it works. But what will happen if you leave it on for a few days or months?

(Give the students time to share their answers with the class.)

They run out of power. This is a metaphor for our relationship with God. We cannot do what we were made to do until He gives us power to do it. We can last for a little while, until our “batteries” run out.

(Now take out a lamp and plug it in.) Compared to a flashlight, how long can the lamp keep shining? We need God’s constant power in our lives if we are truly going to make an impact for Him in the lives of the people around us. We need to tap into that power source—constantly and consistently.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

When we chase after God with all of our hearts, when we make every effort to get to know Him better, He reveals to us our purpose for existing. He tells us the plans He has for us. He gives us courage to face whatever problems may come our way. In order to make this happen, we need to tap into His ultimate power source. Then we can begin not only to see the purpose in everything, but to become purposeful ourselves!

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- *Circle* the main characters in this story.
- What event is occurring here?
- Share any aspects of the story that are new to you.
- Peter and the apostles did not back down even though the circumstances were so intimidating. What can we learn from their actions?
- God sent an angel to open the jail doors for the apostles. What does that reveal about God?
- What lesson from this story will you apply to your life?
- *Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Read Acts 6:1-7.* The apostles could withstand beatings. They dared to rebuke people in positions of authority. Yet they needed to outsource the job of administrative duties in the church to seven others. What does this say about abilities and talents?
- Read Ephesians 2:10. God planned for us to do good things. He has a purpose for us. Peter said: “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another” (1 Peter 4:10, NLT). What talents and abilities do you have? (Sometimes students will refer to performance-based abilities, such as singing, drawing, or playing a musical instrument as talents. This is a good opportunity to broaden their understanding that our talents and abilities can also include listening, problem solving, or compassion.)

**Sharing Context and Background**

*Use the following information to shed more light on specific aspects of the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

1. **The Power to Change.** Despite his initial character flaws and shameful denial of his association with Christ (Mark 14:66-72), after Christ’s resurrection Peter was a changed man. He preached fearlessly and performed many miracles. His actions clearly pointed to the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit—through which there is no task insurmountable. The Holy Spirit is still available to empower believers today. God promised (John 16:1-16) the believers a source of power and help—the Holy Spirit. We should turn to the Holy Spirit to give us strength, courage, and insight to accomplish God’s work for us.

Ellen White offers this insight on the power of the Holy Spirit: “What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered persecution for Christ’s sake? It was union with God, union with the Holy Spirit, union
**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Quitting Time**

Sometimes in class students may act up, appear tired, or seem uninterested in the lesson. They may even request for the class to end early. However, if you do give in to temptation and dismiss the class prematurely, you would have indirectly sent a message to the students who put in extra effort to be in class that their sacrifices are not valued or respected and that the time together studying God’s Word is unimportant. It also sets a precedent that would make it harder for you to overcome later.

with Christ. Reproach and persecution have separated many from earthly friends, but never from the love of Christ” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 85). What can you do today to better experience this life-changing and life-empowering infusion of the Holy Spirit?

2. The Power of Purpose. The apostles declared that they “must obey God,” echoing their earlier rhetorical question in Acts 4:19. Their statement emphasizes their conviction to fulfill God plans and purposes no matter the cost. Previously, Jesus had commanded them (Acts 1:8) and now, the angel of the Lord was directing them (Acts 5:20). Naturally, the apostles knew their purpose.

Although Romans 12:18 encourages us to live at peace with everyone and Jesus laid down the principle of obeying both Caesar and God (Matthew 22:21), yet when a choice is to be made, we can pledge allegiance to only one master. How many times have we chosen the approval of men over God’s approval? Is it because we are unclear as to what God wants from us and has planned for us? How can we attain clarity on this? If we are sure but are avoiding His directives because they do not align with our desires, what can be done to recalibrate our moral compass?

**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

• Design a simple blank business card that says I AM MADE FOR GOD’S PURPOSE and a place for students to sign their name.

• Hand them out and challenge your students to sign their cards. Next, have them pick a Bible verse from the Punch Lines section of their lesson and write it down on the back of the card.

• Encourage your students to put this card in their wallets or purses and whenever they are waiting in line, or for a bus, to take out this card and memorize the text.

During the week pray for your students, that as they read and memorize the text, God will show them

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
opportunities to fulfill His purposes. Discuss the results the following week in Sabbath School.

**Summary**

*Share the following story in your own words:*

“A certain college pastor had an abstract painting on the wall behind his desk. Students would come up to his office and unknowingly say, ‘What’s that? It looks like someone threw up on your wall!’

“And then he would have to explain, ‘My dad painted that. He painted this painting of a magician, but my mom didn’t like it—too dark. One day my dad got a rare brain virus and lost the ability to paint forever. And sometime later, he compromised with my mom on that painting of the magician. He and I took it outside and cut the bottom of it off and reframed the top. Somehow this made it a little softer. So, after my dad died, I took the bottom—the part he signed—and framed it.’

“Of course this description always made the college students feel awful about calling it puke. The problem was they didn’t see the whole picture. Not just the whole painting—but the whole story.

“Sometimes the process of being shaped by God can be painful and difficult, but if we can look up from the problems of the moment, in the distance we should glimpse the joy of knowing that wonderful things happen when we live our lives according to God’s purpose” *(Great Talk Outlines for Youth Ministry, p. 281).*

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 8, 9.
The leaders in the Jewish nation had signally failed of fulfilling God’s purpose for His chosen people. Those whom the Lord had made the depositaries of truth had proved unfaithful to their trust, and God chose others to do His work. In their blindness these leaders now gave full sway to what they called righteous indignation against the ones who were setting aside their cherished doctrines. They would not admit even the possibility that they themselves did not rightly understand the Word, or that they had misinterpreted or misapplied the Scriptures. They acted like men who had lost their reason” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 78, 79).

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”

(Mathew 5:11, NIV)
what do you think?

Read the following statements and, for each one, select one of these responses: (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Disagree, or (4) Strongly Disagree:

____ I am confident sharing my testimony about Jesus to others anytime.
____ I enjoy telling others about God all the time.
____ I know what I am good at and what areas I need help in.
____ My non-Christian friends can tell I love God no matter what circumstances I am in.

INTO THE STORY

“Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people all about this new life.’

“At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

“When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ‘We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.’ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

“Then someone came and said, ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.’ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ‘We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,’ he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.’

“Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings!’”

(Acts 5:17-29, NIV)

did you know?

In 1999 Joshua Piven and David Borgenicht got together to write a manual about what to do if the worst should happen, titled The Worst Case Scenario Survival Handbook. Instructions in this book include:

• how to break down a door.
• how to escape from quicksand,
• how to land a plane, wrestle an alligator, and so on.

Think of what your worst-case scenario would be. Share it with your group.
“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Timothy 1:7-9, NIV).

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“Through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth” (Colossians 1:16, NLT).

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18, NIV).

“Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3, 4, NIV).

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

“The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by His purpose and for His purpose.”

—Rick Warren, Purpose Driven Life, p. 17.
Sabbath

In Acts 5 it says that “more and more men and women believed in the Lord” (Acts 5:14, NIV). Despite seeing the apostles being jailed and beaten in Christ’s defense, the people still believed and accepted Christ. Why?

As you consider your answers in the What Do You Think? activity, which one do you think contains the most compelling reason for others to believe and accept Christ? Explain.

Sunday

As you read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section to prompt your study of the text, notice how the disciples’ love and conviction for God grew deeper and deeper until, despite flogging, they left “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41, NIV). What impressions does their testimony evoke in you today?

Monday

Some people called Matthew 5:1-12 the “be” attitudes of the faith. Jesus concludes His beatitudes with the Key Text for this week’s lesson. What blessings have you seen happen because you or someone else was being “persecuted because of righteousness”? Share your experiences with the class.

Tuesday

Read the quote from The Acts of the Apostles in the Flashlight section of this week’s lesson. Then read Acts 6:1-7. What can you infer will happen to someone who rejects God’s plans and purpose for them? What about those who recognize their talents and use them for God’s work? What talents and abilities do you have?

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Have you ever been judged or laughed at by others for doing what is right? It takes courage to do what is right (or not doing what is wrong) even though you know you could get into all kinds of trouble for it. It takes power to forgive those who mistreat us. This courage, this power, comes only from God. It has nothing to do with our wealth or fame. And it has nothing to do with privilege or good looks. It has everything to do with the presence of the Holy Spirit who lives within each of us who believe! How can you tap into this power? What activities can you add to your daily routine so that you remain constantly tapped into God’s power?

Friday

When we seek God with our whole heart, we don’t have to worry whether or not we’re doing the right thing or what kind of purpose we are supposed to fulfill—it just comes naturally. But in order for that to happen, we need to fill our hearts and minds with His ultimate power source: the Holy Spirit. What more do you need to do to rely on God’s power? How can you make Him more of a priority?

this week’s reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 8, 9.

*Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostles created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlHF1b0I9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
the first christian martyr

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

By any measure, the martyrdom of Stephen is one of the most grizzly episodes in all of Scripture. An innocent man, he is brought to court on trumped-up charges, permitted a brief defense, and then summarily executed, by stoning no less.

The tale is made more disturbing when we consider that Stephen is described as a man “full of God’s grace and power, [who] performed great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8, NIV). He was the kind of person who was a credit to society. But he had the misfortune—or fortune to some—of living during a time of great upheaval. The reverberations from the death of Jesus were just beginning to be felt. The Jews were determined to stamp out all members of the “sect” who believed in Christ. Stephen was a card-carrying member of this group, and he did not hide his allegiance. There’s an important point for our youth to grasp.

Stephen’s trial and death remind us that serving God often exacts a price. In a world in which prosperity preachers insulate their members from the reality that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12, NIV), Stephen’s willing sacrifice reminds us of the life to which we have been called.

The preceding points should be noted as you teach this week. But special emphasis must be placed on the role that Jesus played in the final scenes of Stephen’s life. God gave Stephen a view of Jesus standing on the right hand of the Father, very much alive and very much King. This vision comforts the humble servant of God in his hour of great distress. The Resurrection was no longer some abstract truth he had heard. For Stephen it was now a fact. Stephen transcended the most painful moment in his life, because he caught a glimpse of Jesus.

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Know that obstacles and trials are part of the Christian’s journey. (Know)
- Realize that through Jesus they can face any challenge in life. (Feel)
- Embrace the peace offered by God and share that peace with others. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Death and resurrection*
- Persecution
- Adversity/trials

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

This activity is designed to get the kids talking about some of the downsides of fame and success.

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Key Text: Acts 6:8-10.
Celebrities court the media and then complain when they are hounded, often for their negative behaviors.

Christians who seek to serve God faithfully can expect to attract attention. They will not have to worry about paparazzi photographers, but at some point they will have to stand up for what they believe, and do so against a tide of opposition. This is what Stephen faced. His faithfulness caught the attention of the adversary of our souls.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Across the world today, men and women, young and old, are paying a high price for their faith in Jesus Christ. Consider, for instance, the case of a convert to Christianity named Azir. Mr. Azir lives in Pakistan, where he makes a humble living transporting people in his rickshaw. The rickshaw was provided to him by Voice of the Martyrs ministries.

In addition to transporting people, Azir also transports Bibles and other Christian literature for distribution. On January 26, 2009, Muslim extremists found out what he was doing. They began screaming at him and then proceeded to beat him, loosening several of his teeth in the process. They took Azir’s rickshaw and left him by the side of the road.

Thankfully, through the intervention of a local village elder, the rickshaw was returned and Azir has returned to his work and his ministry.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Religious persecution is a fact of life in many parts of the world. Yet, as Christians, we are called by God to deliver His message to a world desperately in need of the truth. The motivation to carry God’s truth is the same as it was when Stephen gave his life for it. One who has been freed from the power of sin through Jesus’ sinless life, death on the cross, and resurrection are enjoined to share that good news with others. Doing so will inevitably catapult one into direct confrontations with the devil and his agents in human form. But we must not be dissuaded. We must be ready to give our all for a God who gave us all.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- The story of Stephen’s martyrdom may be new to many of your students. As you read the story with them, ask them to give you a one-word description of the emotion that this story evokes in them. Death is never pretty, but a death by stoning was, and is, extremely gruesome. This practice continues today in some countries.
- The tension in the narrative is palpable. The leaders were determined to preserve the Jewish faith and traditions at all cost. They were so blinded by this obsession that they could not see the Spirit of God radiating through the countenance of Stephen. Sometimes we too can become slaves to meaningless traditions when God offers us true meaning.
- Note that Jesus seems to enter the narrative at the very end, but this is not true. Stephen saw the vision of Jesus just before he was killed, but Christ was present with His servant in the person of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the entire Godhead paused its work to be with Stephen that day. Jesus stood by the Father, and the Spirit was in Stephen. God wants to be in our lives in the same way. This is one of the lessons that the students need to know.
- The students were asked to consider the similarities between the death of Jesus and the martyrdom of Stephen. Consider that both Jesus and Stephen were arrested on false charges. Both of them had sham trials. Both asked God to forgive their oppressors before being killed. Both saw heavenly realities in their moment of distress. Stephen was a type of Christ.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Deuteronomy 31:6; Daniel 6:10; John 19:10, 11; Psalm 118:6.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. Opening Skirmishes. The death of Stephen was but the opening skirmish in a long battle to destroy the church of Christ. Following Christ’s death and resurrection, a small group of followers heeded the call of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. Powered by the Holy Spirit poured out at
Pentecost (Acts 2), they started to talk about Jesus to fellow Jews. Jewish leaders took particular umbrage at this, so they tried to stamp out the sect at all cost.

From those early days until this very moment, Satan has tried everything within his power to stop the followers of Jesus. He continues to try to kill them. He tries to seduce them with allures. He tries to push them into fanaticism. He tries to make them apathetic. He introduces heresy into the mix to cause people to lose their way. Yet all his efforts have done nothing but build up God’s church. Persecution has always backfired on Satan. It’s a wonder that he still uses that tired weapon.

2. Self-defense? It bears noting that Stephen’s defense (Acts 7) of his new faith was rooted in the conviction that Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Messiah written about by the prophets of old. He made the point that though Jewish leaders revered the law, the law was not able prevent God’s people, Israel, from descending into rampant idolatry and apostasy (Acts 7:37-43).

Stephen also noted that God’s true tabernacle was not the one made by hands. The Most High didn’t dwell in physical temples erected by humans, Stephen added, for what temple could hold the one who made all things (Acts 7:48-50)? Stephen saved his sharpest rebukes for the end. He aimed all the power of his words at the leaders and declared: “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51, NIV).

For a man about to die, Stephen’s defense was remarkably self-effacing. Stephen saw in this moment an opportunity to tell the truth and, hopefully, save some souls. Ellen White tells us in The Acts of the Apostles that one of the souls he helped save that day was a man named Saul.

3. Good Persecution. Is there such a thing? Consider this quote from the servant of the Lord: “The per-

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.
  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

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secution that came upon the church in Jerusalem resulted in giving a great impetus to the work of the gospel. Success had attended the ministry of the word in that place, and there was danger that the disciples would linger there too long, unmindful of the Savior’s commission to go to all the world” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 105).

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Give each student a pencil and a 3x5 card. Have someone read John 14:27 in the hearing of the class. Repeat it if necessary.

Ask the students to take one minute to jot down all the things stressing them out and complicating their lives. When the students are finished, collect the cards and pray for the students. Ask God to do something in the coming week to bring His peace into the life of each student. Pull out the cards next week and debrief with them how the week went.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The call to stand for Christ will come to every follower of Christ. What we do with our moment will define us and likely impact the faith of others whom we influence. Stephen offers us a clear example of how to live for God in times of severe crisis.

Stephen was prepared for his moment because he had a strong relationship with God that shone through his life. He knew the Word of God, as evidenced by his defense, and he was not afraid to speak truth to the powerful.

The Spirit of God rested on him and gave him strength to endure his hour of trial. Near the end of his life, he was ushered into the very throne room of heaven and permitted to see a sight viewed by few human beings.

We are modern-day Stephens, and this is our moment to shine for God. All will not be called to die physically, but some will. Let us be ready.

* Fundamental Belief No. 26.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 10, 11.
Flashlight

“As Stephen stood face to face with his judges to answer to the charge of blasphemy, a holy radiance shone upon his countenance, and ‘all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.’ Many who beheld this light trembled and veiled their faces, but the stubborn unbelief and prejudice of the rulers did not waver” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 99).

Keytext

“No now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen . . . who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.”

(Acts 6:8-10, NIV)
do you think?

Big entertainment stars often complain about the nonstop attention that they receive from the “paparazzi.” Some stars have even considered quitting the entertainment business altogether, but few ever do.

If you were a public figure, which of the following would upset you most:

___ stalkers hanging around your property?
___ people rummaging through your trash?
___ photographers following you 24/7?
___ people rummaging through your trash?
___ fans constantly asking you for autographs?

INTO THE STORY

The Setup: “Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

“Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’

“So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, ‘This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth

will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.’

“All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”

Stephen’s Defense: “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

“However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?” says the Lord. “Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?”

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

The Stoning of Stephen: “When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

...
“Look,” he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

(Acts 6:8-15; 7:44-58, NIV)

### OUT OF THE STORY

Had you ever read this story before? Describe some of the emotions you are feeling now, having read the story.

__________________________________________________________

Go through this week’s Scripture story and put an X by parts of the story in which you see tension.

Who are the main characters in this drama? Why are the Jewish leaders so upset with a man like Stephen who does wondrous miracles?

__________________________________________________________

At what point does Jesus enter the story? What is the significance of that moment?

__________________________________________________________

What two lessons do you take away from this biblical episode?

__________________________________________________________

What similarities do you see between the stoning of Stephen and the crucifixion of Jesus?

__________________________________________________________

### punch lines

“Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them’” (Revelation 14:13, NIV).

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5, NIV).

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12, NIV).

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die’” (John 11:25, NIV).

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

“‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

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(Acts 6:8-15; 7:44-58, NIV)
Who or what is your source of wisdom? If you spend little time with God, can you really call Him your source of wisdom and power?

Tuesday
Place yourself in the gallery described in this week’s Flashlight quotation by Ellen G. White. All around you are spectators and agitators. Leaders mill about, whispering to each other and casting deadly glances at the calm man standing before them. Some cannot bear to look at him; others tap their feet nervously as he speaks.

Find a dictionary and look up the word “radiance.” Write the definition here:

If you were in the presence of someone who had that kind of luminescent light around them, would you want to harm them? Why did the Jewish leaders press on in their desire to kill Stephen? What drove them?

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

Read Acts 7:54-56. Whom did Stephen see as he looked up to heaven?

Why do you think God allowed Stephen to see this scene before He died?

Stephen had probably heard of Jesus’ words found in the John 11:25 Punch Line from the disciples and/or other followers of Jesus. He believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but seeing Jesus standing to the right of God the Father sealed his faith. He knew that though he was about to die, he would one day rise again, as will all faithful followers of Christ.
go the distance

Key Text: Philippians 3:13, 14.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
Saul. Paul. The names alone almost write the story for us. They describe one man who lived two distinctly different lives. The apostle Paul is revered today, and rightly so, for helping to engineer the foundation of the Christian church. It is his letters, his life experiences, his holy boldness that gave shape to the faith.

Yet long before this titan of the faith set about his mission, he was on another. In his former life he is described as “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Acts 9:1, NIV). It would have been wonderful for the ancient church if Saul had been only a heavy breather, but there was much more to him. He presided over the murder of Stephen and many other believers. He was sincere in his efforts to rid the world of these troublesome followers of Jesus, but he was sincerely wrong.

This point is one to be emphasized as the lesson is taught. Sometimes we can be quite wrong in our assessment of another’s faith, so we should not be swift to condemn anyone. We must be led by God’s Word and the Holy Spirit in all our interactions with people of differing faiths.

Saul’s work of destruction was so thorough and efficient that Jesus had to arrest him, change his name, and set him on a different course. The journey begun at the Damascus road meeting with Jesus was a miracle of epic proportions. God took the man most dedicated to destroying His church and turned him into its chief exponent. This is what Christ wants to do in the life of all who accept conviction and submit their life to Him. When Paul sees Jesus face to face, his journey will be complete.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Discover that God has a unique purpose and destiny for their lives. (Know)
• Be challenged to begin their journey with God and grow in grace with Him. (Feel)
• Share their new walk with God with others who are searching for God’s leading in their lives. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
• Conviction
• Growth/transformation
• Bible/Holy Scriptures

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

The objective of this activity is to get the students to think about what it takes to reach the prize for which one is striving. Every Olympic athlete we see on the world stage is one who has been training for many
years to maximize the moment. Through the application of certain principles and hard work, they are transformed, able to pursue their dream of sport success.

In the Christian life there’s a goal to be won, a prize worth striving for, and that prize is God, poured out in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul used many sports metaphors to make points about the Christian’s journey to God. While life is not a game, we can learn much from those who dedicate their lives to achieving a dream.

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

“Sociology professor Anthony Campolo recalls a deeply moving incident that happened in a Christian junior high camp where he served. One of the campers, a boy with spastic paralysis, was the object of heartless ridicule. When he would ask a question, the boys would deliberately answer in a halting, mimic-icking way. One night his cabin group chose him to lead the devotions before the entire camp. It was one more effort to have some ‘fun’ at his expense.

“Unashamedly the spastic boy stood up, and in his strained, slurred manner—each word coming with enormous effort—he said simply, ‘Jesus loves me—and I love Jesus!’ That was all. Conviction fell upon those junior-highers. Many began to cry. Revival gripped the camp. Years afterward, Campolo still meets men in the ministry who came to Christ because of that testimony.” *(Source: Alice Gray [compiler], “Just a Kid With Cerebral Palsy,” *Stories for the Heart* (Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah Books, 1996), pp. 60, 61.)

**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

The love of Jesus really does have the power to change everything. The young boy at the junior high camp had found the secret that makes life bearable and makes human beings changeable.

When we consider that Saul was persecuting God’s church while claiming to be a part of God’s family, it gives us pause. It was the Damascus road meeting with Jesus that started Paul’s transformation. For the first time he saw how much his behavior was hurting Jesus. He wanted to be transformed. He no longer wanted to accept his life as it had been. That’s the effect that Jesus has on those who look into His face.

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them:

The apostle Paul is one of the most famous Bible characters. Next to Jesus, he is perhaps the most widely quoted of all biblical writers. Most kids will know something of Paul’s life story—his brushes with death, breaking out of jail by earthquake, being bitten by snakes, whippings, etc. However, most of your students may not know about Paul’s former life. Spend some time detailing his former exploits to give the backdrop to his awesome conversion.

Barnabas plays a very critical role in ushering Paul into his ministry. Barnabas’ name means “son of consolation,” and he truly lives up to his name. He is willing to put his reputation and “street cred” on the line to protect Paul. Ananias also comes in for high praise for his willingness to listen to God when He tells him to go to Saul. This gives us some idea of just how scary a person Saul was before his conversion experience.

Notice that Jesus is central to Paul’s conversion, acceptance by the church brethren, and entry into ministry. Jesus is with Paul every step of the way, growing him into the man he was designed to be.

You may want to highlight the fact that Paul’s physical blindness followed his spiritual blindness. Blindness forces one to concentrate the mind. It heightens the other human senses. Perhaps Jesus wanted Paul to focus exclusively on Him without any distractions. This take-charge man who seemed to be indestructible was totally and completely helpless. He had to trust God.

*Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Psalm 51; Mark 5:1-15; John 4:17-29; Isaiah 30:15.*

**Sharing Context and Background**

*Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

1. **Long Time Coming.** As is often the case, what seems like a momentary occurrence is a long time in the making. Ellen White notes that God had been trying for some time to get through to Saul. He was convicted by Stephen’s sermon before the Jewish council. Sometimes he would toss and turn all night, fighting against the conviction that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 116, 117).

When Jesus finally spoke to Saul for the first time
Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Go Where They Are

If your students are members of the Facebook social network, consider sending them a message during the week preceding this lesson. Ask each of them to send you a three-sentence note describing the moment when they first accepted Jesus into their heart. Ask them to share the time and place where their transformation began. Note: not all kids will have done this, so be sure to include something in the note that lets all the kids know the responses are totally voluntary.

When you get to class, choose one or two notes to share. Ask the writers for permission to share their testimony, or better yet, ask them if they’d like to do it themselves.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.
  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

with His own voice, it was the culmination of a long effort to meet with Saul. Now Jesus had his undivided attention.

2. Baptized With the Spirit. Jesus directed Ananias to lay his hand on Saul that he might be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This baptism occurred about three days after Saul’s Damascus road encounter with Jesus. Saul had accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, but he still needed the filling of the Holy Spirit to make the work of Christ effectual in his life.

Before leaving His disciples, Jesus made this promise: “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you” (John 16:13-15, NIV).

The work of growing up into Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul needed the Spirit to fit him for his life’s work, and so do we.

3. Start Now. One of the beautiful parts of Paul’s transformation narrative is his immediate willingness to begin working for Christ. He is not careful to move slowly into ministry; he jumps in with both feet. Acts 9:19, 20 tells us that after he had broken his three-day fast, he immediately preached about Jesus in synagogues that He was the Son of God. One can only imagine the effect that the sight of Paul must have had on the congregants.

There’s an important point here. People who accept Jesus as their Savior must be allowed to engage in the work of leading others to Christ. They must not be given certain responsibilities until they are knowledgeable and grounded enough to meet those tasks, but they should not be held back from opportunities to tell their story.
III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Invite the students to sit quietly with their eyes closed. Ask them to think of one change they’d like God to make in their lives. Tell them to focus on something that would help them to have a deeper relationship with God. Ask the students to pray silently for God’s help to make the change they seek.

After a minute or so, close with a prayer of thanks to God for answers to your prayers.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God is on a mission to save all humanity from the ravages of sin. In truth, He has already done so. God went the distance, the extra mile, when sent His Son Jesus to die for the sins of the world. Salvation is free and available to all who accept it.

The apostle Paul accepted Jesus’ call to a new life. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he set about to fulfill the destiny that God had outlined for him. From a life driven by destruction God created a life driven by love. Paul walked with Jesus until they two became one and he could exclaim: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21, NIV).

One day if we’re faithful, we will see Paul in heaven. We will be able to ask him whether the journey was worth all that he suffered. Perhaps his answer will be the same as it was when he wrote to the fledgling Roman church: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18, NIV).

1Fundamental Belief No. 11.
2Fundamental Belief No. 1.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 12, 13, 14.
In the record of the conversion of Saul important principles are given us, which we should ever bear in mind, Saul was brought directly into the presence of Christ. He was one whom Christ intended for a most important work, one who was to be a “chosen vessel” unto Him; yet the Lord did not at once tell him of the work that had been assigned him. He arrested him in his course and convicted him of sin; but when Saul asked, “What wilt thou have me to do?” the Savior placed the inquiring Jew in connection with His church, there to obtain a knowledge of God’s will concerning him” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 120).
The 2014 Winter Olympics are being held from February 7-23, in Sochi, Russia. It is a showcase of amazing athletes, all of whom spent years honing their skills in preparation for this moment—their moment.

On a scale from 1 (absolutely essential) to 5 (not too essential), rank the following items in terms of their importance to an athlete when preparing for success in Sochi.

- Rest
- A healthy diet
- Dreams and goals
- Practice
- Determination

Did you know that the apostle Paul traveled and shared the good news about salvation through Jesus in ancient Greece? Paul was particularly familiar with the sporting events of the Greeks. In fact, no other Bible character used as many sports metaphors to describe his journey with God and that of others. For instance, as he neared the end of his life he wrote this to a young follower named Timothy: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’

‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’

“The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

“In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’

“Yes, Lord,” he answered.

“The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’

“Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’

“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’

“Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’

“Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized.”

(Acts 9:1-18, NIV)
punch lines

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life” (John 6:63, NIV).

“He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way” (Psalm 25:9, NIV).

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper of worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:1, 2, NIV).

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21, NIV).

“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13, NIV).

“Sometimes a breakdown can be the beginning of a kind of breakthrough, a way of living in advance through a trauma that prepares you for a future of radical transformation.”—Cherrie Moraga, writer, essayist, poet, playwright.

“The distance is nothing; it is only the first step that is difficult.”—Madame Marie du Deffand, 18th-century French hostess and patron of the arts.
Sabbath

Complete this week’s What Do You Think? activity. How did you rank the items listed? Which was most important to you? You probably had some trouble ranking the listed items because all of them are important to achieving success in the Olympics. When an athlete has all five items working in their lives, they are poised for greatness. Spiritual transformations are not much different. They require certain items such as a call to change, acceptance of Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, a vision of a new life in Christ, a desire to please God, prayer, Bible study, and faith sharing—to name a few.

Which of the items above is most important in one’s journey to transformation? Explain.

Now read John 10:9 to find the answer. This is the door that Paul used to begin his journey.

Sunday

After reading the Into the Story section, complete the Out of the Story questions. After reading this powerful episode, one has to wonder why Jesus would bother with someone who was “breathing fire” against His followers. Before his conversion, Paul was a killer.

How did Paul describe his former life? (Acts 26:9-11). From what you’ve read so far about Paul in this week’s lesson, share in your own words what you believe Jesus saw in him. What qualities did he possess that God wanted to use?

What does Paul’s story teach us about God’s ability to change people, no matter what they’ve done?

Monday

This Sabbath’s Key Text is taken from one of Paul’s fantastic letters. In it he writes to members of the Christian church in a place called Philippi, in ancient Greece. Note his use of a sports metaphor here again. He presses toward the prize, conscious that he hasn’t attained it as yet.

Hidden in this Scripture is a very important skill that runners have to master. Read the Key Text again and write what you think the skill is and how it pertains to the Christian life.

Tuesday

This week’s Flashlight quotation is quite powerful. For instance, we are told that God was working to convert Saul because he was a “chosen vessel.” But chosen for what? That must have been on Saul’s mind when his world turned upside down on the road to Damascus.

God had to prepare Paul for a special ministry. Part of that preparation required him to be a part of a church family, as the quotation notes. In your own words, explain why you believe God felt that Paul needed a church family, a group of like-minded believers.

Wednesday

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

One of the truly beautiful parts of Paul’s transformation was his willingness to submit himself totally to Jesus Christ, the kind of submission mentioned in the Romans 12:1, 2 Punch Line. But Paul went even further. His desire to know Jesus was so strong that he immersed himself in the Bible that he had, which largely consisted of the Old Testament. Paul wanted to grow to become all that God wanted him to be.

Years later Paul wrote to the Philippians about how he lived his life. Read Philippians 1:21.

How did Paul describe his life?

Surrender to the transforming power of Jesus Christ had transformed Paul!

Thursday

It would be nice to think that Paul’s life after transformation was easy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Read 2 Corinthians 11:25-28. Why was Paul willing to endure so many trials? Why didn’t he give up?

Read 2 Timothy 4:8 and Romans 8:38, 39 to find out the secret of Paul’s strength. God offers you the same strength for the challenges you face in life.

Friday

Are you headed down the wrong path in life? Do you want God to put you on the path that He designed for you? Why not take a moment and pray, asking God to do that for you right now? Don’t worry about saying a bunch of fancy words to God. Just ask God the same question that Paul asked Him: What do you want me to do?

God will lead you to your destiny! Keep trusting Him (Jeremiah 29:11).


this week’s reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 12, 13, 14.

*Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostle created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
peter principles

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Jesus’ first words to Simon Peter were “Come, follow me” (Mark 1:17). His final words to him were “You must follow me” (John 21:22). In between those commands Peter’s colorful life flourishes with essential life lessons for all who would strive to follow Jesus.

Peter was a fisherman when he first met Jesus. That encounter with Jesus radically redefined the trajectory of Peter’s life. Jesus gave Peter a new name—“Simon, son of John,” but more than that Jesus gave him a new life. Peter was certainly never perfect, but he was transformed into the character of Christ. Peter gave his life to proclaim the good news of a risen Christ. He was the recognized leader among Jesus’ disciples. He was the first great voice to share the gospel during and after Pentecost. He most likely knew Mark and gave him information for the Gospel of Mark. And finally, he wrote the books of 1 and 2 Peter.

This lesson focuses on Peter. Given the colorful stories, engaging personality, and personal writings of Peter, there are many directions you could take this study. The primary story of this lesson recounts the deliverance of Peter from prison. Thus the emphasis of this lesson will be on miracles and the miraculous. Intertwined in the narrative are lessons about grace and love. For when Jesus chooses His followers, He is looking for perfect people; He is looking for real folk who can be changed by His love.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Hear the story of Peter’s miraculous deliverance from prison. (Know)
- See Peter as a real person—marked by both success and failure. (Feel)
- Have an opportunity to respond to God’s desire to perform miracles in them, just as He did in Peter. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Miracles and the miraculous
- Grace
- Love is...

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

As an alternate activity, use this scenario:

Assign students the following roles from the story of Peter’s deliverance from prison: Peter, two soldiers, an angel, two guards, believers who were gathered at Mary’s house to pray, and Rhoda. Have the students act out the story as you read Acts 12:1-18.

Illustration

Our story begins in Rome, July 19, A.D. 64, when
Nero, a lunatic emperor, torched his own city.

It was common knowledge in that day that Nero hated Rome’s architectural layout. The inner-city streets were too narrow; the buildings were dilapidated. When foreign dignitaries came to visit Rome, Nero was embarrassed to give them a tour of his town.

So Nero constructed a model of an improved, symmetrical Rome. But Nero knew that his ambition would never be realized—unless, of course, by some stroke of fate the old city would be destroyed. Although it could not be proved, public opinion held that on the night of July 19 this demented dictator coaxed fate along and set his city ablaze.

According to the historical account, when the flames subsided in places, Nero commanded his men to reignite the fire. Out of Rome’s smoldering debris, the phrase “Nero fiddled while Rome burned” was coined.

Imagine the protests that were sparked by this act of arson. Incensed Roman citizens rallied against Nero demanding retribution. Feeling the heat, Nero claimed, “The Christians did it. They have destroyed our beloved city in hopes of building another city for themselves.” He then commanded, “Soldiers, arrest all Christians and throw them in the dungeon.”

In their commentary on 1 Peter, Pastor Doug Murry and Barb Shurin explain: “Having his soldiers arrest the Christians en masse at their meeting places, Nero not only lent credence to his monstrous lie, but also cleverly and diabolically got the Roman senators and citizens off his back. This marked the beginning of the Christians’ hiding andmeeting in the catacombs under the city—the approximate time when 1 Peter was written.”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Keep this historical context in mind when you read 1 and 2 Peter as well as the stories of Peter in the book of Acts. It was a time of severe persecution when Christians were fed to half-starved lions for sport. Most Christians were running for their lives, just praying to survive. Because of Peter’s unique relationship to Jesus, as well as his own story of imprisonment and persecution, his voice rings a credible call to remain faithful to God—no matter the circumstances.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Acts 12:1-23—What is the most unbelievable story of a miracle that you have ever heard? How does it compare to the story of Peter’s escape from prison? Why do you think God freed Peter? In verse 17 who is the “James” that Peter is talking about (see Galatians 1:18, 19)? Why would Peter mention him specifically? Why do you think that God allowed James to die (Acts 12:2-11) and yet miraculously saved Peter?

Reflect: What “jail” in your life are you praying that God would help you to escape? In your mind, would God’s deliverance for you be any less miraculous than it was for Peter? Why or why not?

- 1 Peter—Suffering through the “painful trial” (1 Peter 4:12), Christians were hurting. Picture the dispersed Christians who are being hunted. Imagine Sister Martha or Brother Nicodemus holed up in some nook with other believers. Their lives are endangered, and when you’re dealing with someone who is on the brink of death, you don’t talk about trivial matters. You talk about life and death stuff. You concentrate on what really matters. Scan through the book of 1 Peter and find passages that illustrate the life-and-death nature of Peter’s message.

- 2 Peter—The theme of 2 Peter varies from that of 1 Peter. The second letter addresses the issue of laxity in the church—which comes as a result of defective doctrine. For example, one of the stalwart teachings in question centered on the Second Coming. “Where is this ‘coming’?” the scoffers asked. “Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:4). Peter answers (verse 9): “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Scan through the book of 2 Peter and identify other doctrines that were being challenged.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to help sort out some of the characters in the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

- Herod Agrippa I—“It was about this time that
King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church . . .” (Acts 12:1, NIV). Four generations of the Herod dynasty are mentioned in the Bible: Herod the Great murdered the children at the time of Jesus’ birth; Herod Antipas was involved in Jesus’ trial and John the Baptist’s death; Herod Agrippa I murdered the apostle James and is the ruler referred to in Acts 12; and finally, Herod Agrippa II was one of Paul’s judges.

Herod Agrippa I (grandson of Herod the Great and brother of Herodias—the woman responsible for the death of John the Baptist) enjoyed modest favor among the Jews because his grandmother (Miriamne) was Jewish. Although as a young man he had been imprisoned by Tiberias, he was later trusted by Rome and assigned the governorship of most of Palestine. His fatal error came while on a visit to Caesarea when the people called him a god and he accepted their praise. “Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died” (Acts 12:23, NIV). Like his grandpa, uncle, and son after him, Herod Agrippa I was exposed to truth, but he would not accept it. Religion was important only as it bolstered his political aspirations.

- **Mary the Mother of John Mark**—“When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying” (Acts 12:12, NIV). Scholars suggest that Mary’s home was the headquarters of the Christian church. It has also been suggested that it was in Mary’s home where Jesus and His disciples partook of the Last Supper. Notice that in this story, her home served as a meeting place for the believers to pray. When they faced impossible odds, they turned to God for help.

- **John Mark**—John Mark, more commonly referred to as Mark, wrote the Gospel of Mark. He was a helpful companion to three influential

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### Tips for Top-notch Teaching

**Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students**

Education theorists suggest that learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Superior learning is collaborative and social rather than competitive and isolated. This principle rings true in the traditional classroom; it is also true in the Sabbath School setting. Working with others tends to heighten involvement in learning. Sharing one’s own ideas and responding to others’ perspectives focuses concentration and deepens understanding. So, as much as possible in your context, encourage reciprocity and cooperation among your students.

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### Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
leaders in the early church—Barnabas, Paul, and Peter. The material in his Gospel is primarily attributed to Peter. Mark’s role as an assistant seems to have served him well as an astute observer. He listened to Peter’s stories about Jesus over and over and was one of the first to put these accounts into writing.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Refer to a story in the news that some interpret as a miracle. Discuss whether or not our interpretation of events taints our understanding of miracles. For example, you could refer to the news story of the U.S. Airways plane crash on January 15, 2009. According to news sources on the Internet: “With both engines out, a cool-headed pilot maneuvered his crowded jetliner over New York City and ditched it in the frigid Hudson River on Thursday, and all 155 on board were pulled to safety as the plane slowly sank. It was, the governor said, ‘a miracle on the Hudson.’” Compare and contrast these modern-day miracles with the miracles in the life of Peter.

Summary

Referring to the story of Peter’s escape from prison, Bible scholar William Barclay writes: “In this story we do not necessarily see a miracle. It may well be the story of a thrilling rescue; but, however it happened, the hand of God was most definitely in it.”

Points for closing discussion:

- Would you agree or disagree with Barclay’s statement? Why or why not?
- Share a story from your life where you knew “the hand of God” was at work.
- Do you suppose that miracles are happening all around us—every day—that we miss?
- What is the most important lesson that we can learn from the life of Peter?

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2 As quoted at abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?id=6606452

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 15, 51, 52.
flashlight

“It was after Peter had been led to self-renunciation and entire reliance upon divine power, that he received his call to act as an undershepherd. Christ had said to Peter, before his denial of Him, ‘When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.’ Luke 22:32. These words were significant of the wide and effectual work which this apostle was to do in the future for those who should come to the faith. For this work, Peter’s own experience of sin and suffering and repentance had prepared him. Not until he had learned his weakness could he know the believer’s need of dependence on Christ” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 515).

keytext

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

(2 Peter 1:3, NIV)
Below are a few statements of miracles, grace, and love. Which ones do you believe completely (circle these)? Which ones do you have doubts about (put a question mark by these)?

a. I believe in miracles.
b. Every life is a miracle.
c. Miracles occur more for people of faith.
d. Grace is impossible to fully grasp.
e. I am 100 percent positive that I am saved by grace.
f. I believe that only people filled with the Holy Spirit are capable of fully loving others.
g. “Grace is opposed to merit, but it is not opposed to effort” (Mark the Ascetic).
h. There is no stronger force than love.
i. “In the Christian life, nothing, nothing at all, can be purchased at the do-it-yourself shop” (Harry Blamires).
j. “In the Christian life, nothing, nothing at all, can be purchased at the do-it-yourself shop” (Harry Blamires).

Most scholars believe that First and Second Peter were both written by the apostle Peter. He addressed the letters to Jewish Christians throughout Asia Minor who were being persecuted for their faith. First Peter is a message of comfort and encouragement to remember that through all the suffering in this world Jesus offers hope.

While he wrote his first letter to teach about prevailing through persecution (external trials), he wrote the second letter to teach about handling heresy in the church (internal trials).

**into the story**

“It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

“The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’ he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

“Then the angel said to him, ‘Put on your clothes and sandals.’ And Peter did so. ‘Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,’ the angel told him.

Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

“Then Peter came to himself and said, ‘Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.’

“When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’

“You’re out of your mind,’ they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, ‘It must be his angel.’

“But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison.”

(Acts 12:1-17, NIV)
“Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News” (Philippians 1:27, NLT).

“Now that I am old and gray, do not abandon me, O God. Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me” (Psalm 71:18, NLT).

“But my life is worth nothing to me unless I use it for finishing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus—the work of telling others the Good News about the wonderful grace of God” (Acts 20:24, NLT).

“Then Jesus began to denounce the towns where he had done so many of his miracles, because they hadn’t repented of their sins and turned to God” (Matthew 11:20, NLT).

“Who can list the glorious miracles of the Lord? Who can ever praise him enough?” (Psalm 106:2, NLT).

“Anything God has ever done, he can do now. Anything God has ever done anywhere, he can do here. Anything God has ever done for anyone, he can do for you.”—A. W. Tozer, 20th-century American Protestant pastor and author.

“Too many times we miss so much because we live on the low level of the natural, the ordinary, the explainable. We leave no room for God to do the exceeding abundant thing above all that we can ask or think.”—Vance Havner, 20th-century pastor and author.
makingitreal

Sabbath
Review the statements in the What Do You Think? section that you have questions about. Review each one and write next to it why you question it.

Sunday
Think about all the stories you know of the apostle Peter—walking on the water, denying Christ, asking Jesus to drench his entire body at the Lord’s Supper, etc. Next, read through First and Second Peter. Scan the book of Acts, looking for additional stories about Peter. Finally, read the story of Peter’s escape from prison in the Into the Story section. After all this exposure to the man Peter you should have a sense of who this man was. Based on that understanding, write a personal ad for www.elharmony.com describing the desirable traits of Peter.

Monday
Review the Key Text. Make a list of everything you need. Next, claim the promise contained in the Key Text and believe that God will do as He says and meet all your needs.

Tuesday
Review the Flashlight section and reflect on these questions:

Why do you think Peter first had to be “led to self-renunciation” before receiving his call from God?

Does Jesus’ statement in Luke 22:32 suggest that Peter was not converted when he was a disciple of Jesus? What must happen for genuine conversion to take place?

What do you think God is preparing you to do through your “experience of sin and suffering and repentance”?

Wednesday
Read the verses in Punch Lines. Circle the verse that speaks especially to your life today. Why is this verse meaningful to you? Think about somebody who might be encouraged by the same verse and pass it along by sending an e-mail, a text message, or a good old-fashioned hand-addressed note in the mail.

Thursday
How am I “advancing by faith toward the heights of Christian perfection”?

“For many years Peter had been urging upon the believers the necessity of a constant growth in grace and in a knowledge of the truth; and now, knowing that soon he would be called to suffer martyrdom for his faith, he once more drew attention to the precious privileges within the reach of every believer. In the full assurance of his faith the aged disciple exhorted his brethren to steadfastness of purpose in the Christian life. ‘Give diligence,’ he pleaded, ‘to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ Precious assurance! Glorious is the hope before the believer as he advances by faith toward the heights of Christian perfection!” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 533).

What do you think Ellen White means by “Christian perfection”?

Friday
What can I learn about miracles from Peter?

Do you believe that the same miracles (walking on the water, escaping prison, healing the crippled beggar, etc.) that Peter experienced could happen to you? Why or why not?

If the only story in the Bible that you knew was the story of Peter, how would you finish this sentence?

Love is:

this week’s reading*
The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 15, 51, 52.

*Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of The Acts of the Apostle created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/101/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.U9HfTcBn9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.


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the epicenter for missions

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
Can you imagine what a daunting task the early church may have felt to spread the gospel to the world? Well, actually, Luke doesn’t tell us that they viewed it as daunting at all! What is clear is that in the midst of persecution and hardships, these early believers were full of joy—and they were unstoppable. They were so infected with the love of Christ that their enthusiasm was contagious. When we speak of mission work today, we seem to feel the weight of all that needs to be done “so that we can go home.” But that attitude does not seem to exist in these chapters of Acts as we read of the lead-up to and the first missionary journey of Paul.

The believers in Antioch were so infectious in their faith that two interesting events occurred: (1) News of their faith reached Jerusalem, and a group of elders came to check them out. (2) The people of Antioch coined the name “Christians” to describe these believers.

God picked just the right place to launch His people full throttle into missionary work. Antioch was at the crossroads of the Roman Empire. The believers there were a multicultural, international group. And they appointed two perfectly suited individuals to “go”: Barnabas, an elder filled with compassion and with the gift of encouragement; and Paul, a highly educated Pharisee and Jew who was also a Roman citizen and a Hellenist. What a team! What a community of believers!

II. TARGET
The students will:

- Explore the challenges of taking the gospel message to nonbelievers. (Know)
- Discover how God empowers His messengers through the Holy Spirit and through the faith community. (Feel)
- Ask God to reveal His purpose for their life and commit to following that call. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
- Witnessing/sharing our faith
- God’s call for the church and the individual member—“the Great Commission”*
- How to approach nonbelievers with the message of hope

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity
Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. Ask the students whether they took time on their own to finish the sentences. If not, then do the exercise together and discuss the answers.

Ask: “Did it surprise any of you to learn that we still have more than half the world to evangelize 21 centuries later? Explain.”

Illustration
Share this illustration in your own words:
A little more than 100 years ago, near Detroit, Michigan, a young man had a factory that built a new-fangled invention called the “automobile,” more deri-
sively referred to as a “horseless carriage.” The new invention allowed people to travel farther and with less concern than with a horse. The idea of driving yourself around caught on quickly—especially among the affluent.

But that wasn’t enough for Henry Ford: he wanted millions of people to be able to afford to buy his car. He refined the manufacturing process until automobiles could be assembled quickly on a production line. Using standardized parts and, initially, only one paint color, Ford’s “Model A” and subsequent “Model T” brought the price of driving within reach of those millions of people which, of course, led to the auto-dependent world in which we find ourselves today. But Ford started with a goal: that his product would have that wide reach.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story
Share the following in your own words:

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth set for themselves a huge challenge: to bring a new means of salvation and being right with God to a world desperately in need of both. You can live in many parts of the world without an automobile, but you can’t see God without Jesus. The disciples used themselves and their lives to bring this message to the people of their day. Now, it’s our turn to live out the Great Commission and make the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob accessible to all. What means and methods does our church have available today to see the Great Commission fulfilled in our lifetime? How has God moved upon you to participate in this great ministry?

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• Time and again throughout the Bible, we see how God has taken bleak circumstances and turned them around for His purpose and, yes, for His glory. Whether it’s Joseph languishing in a pit on his way to Egyptian slavery and a prison cell, or Moses’ exile from the palace of Pharaoh, or, as we see today, the scattering of the early believers from Jerusalem, there’s a way God can turn tragedy into opportunity. Write down an example of such a change from your life, or the life of someone close to you.

• The people in Antioch who believed weren’t just Jews, but also Gentiles—people for whom the God of Israel was supposedly a stranger and unapproachable without their first being circumcised and brought into the Jewish fold. But these self-appointed evangelists didn’t use yardsticks; they just told the good news, and people responded. Do you see a similar opportunity around you today? Are there groups of students or coworkers you can go to and reach?

• In Antioch Saul and Barnabas spent a year teaching others before they were called to the mission field. Is there preparation you might be doing now to make yourself ready for what the Lord might have you do in a year or two?

• Throughout their first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas went first to the local synagogues and spoke to those most likely to respond. Yet others were hearing and responding as well. Is there a parallel you can think of in your experience? Does your church’s outreach have unintended, but pleasant, consequences?

• In Pisidian Antioch the disciples spoke so well that they were invited back for a second Sabbath’s worship to discuss their ideas. Can you think of ways to express your faith that keep people asking questions?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Acts 7; 8:1-3; 9; 18:1-10; Romans 15:14-22; Ephesians 3:7-13; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

It is interesting to see how God works as we see Saul of Tarsus come to be chosen to team up with Barnabas to launch the first missionary journey. First of all, the persecution of Stephen is mentioned as a reason why the believers had fled Judea and scattered throughout the region. Remember, Saul was a ring-leader in persecuting the early church, and history reveals that he stood holding the tunics of those who stoned Stephen to death. While Saul was headed off to chase down the believers as they fled Jerusalem and Judea, God found him, blinded him, and later told him that he would take the message of salvation to the Gentiles.

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
Paul was uniquely qualified for the task; first, because God had called him, and second, because he was a Pharisee and leader among the Jews, but also a Roman citizen. He was a Hellenist. He didn’t live in the confines of a Jewish-only community, but was raised a Jew among the “heathen.” He was both religious and worldly in his outlook. He spoke Greek and Hebrew.

It is also noteworthy that God launched the missionary work from Antioch. This community of believers was international and multicultural in their makeup.

Both the body of believers and the individuals within that body were united in their joy to spread the word throughout the whole region, not being intimidated or put off by cultural or ethnic differences. Christ had come to them, and their joy was such that they wanted to take Him to others without any barriers in their mind about the “heathen.”

Another irony is how Paul handled a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas) while he, Barnabas, and John Mark were on the island of Paphos. When Bar-Jesus tried to stop them from sharing the message of salvation with the governor there, Paul rebuked him and told him that he would be struck with blindness. Just as God stopped Paul from interfering in the spread of the gospel, Paul called upon God to do the same thing to Elymas. Elymas wouldn’t be permanently blind, but how like God is that! The governor received salvation and perhaps later Elymas himself came around to the truth.

God certainly has a highly developed sense of irony, and He uses all our experiences to strengthen our faith when we are heavily tried and bombarded by Satan. When He calls us, He equips us to serve Him, and this strengthens our faith and our joy in our relationship with Him.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Distribute paper and pencils to the students. Ask them to think about the people they come in contact with outside of their church family. As individuals come to mind, ask them to write their names down. Then ask them to write down anything they have done to

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
express their faith with this person(s). Ask: “Do you make it a habit to pray for them? Do you share Christ openly and verbally? Or do you witness by example?” Encourage the students to intentionally commit themselves to witnessing to the nonbelievers in their lives.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The first-century believers were so infected with the love of Jesus that they couldn’t keep quiet. Their joy spilled out into their community and into the regions beyond. In each city where Barnabas and Paul established a group of believers, whatever obstacles this group encountered, they remained firm in their faith. They were marked by their joy and by the encouragement and support they offered to Paul and Barnabas. In each place, Acts records that their numbers increased, and Paul and Barnabas appointed elders and deacons to care for the believers there. Each of these new churches offered comfort to the apostles, and they collected offerings for the believers in Jerusalem who were struggling. These acts were evidence of their newfound faith in Christ. Persecution didn’t stop them, but only strengthened their ties to God and to each other. That’s what the church at any age should look like.

* Fundamental Belief No. 12.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 16, 17, 18.
flashlight

“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.’ They rejoiced exceedingly that Christ recognized them as the children of God, and with grateful hearts they listened to the word preached. Those who believed were zealous in communicating the gospel message to others, and thus ‘the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region’” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 173, 174).

keytext

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”

(Acts 13:38, 39, NIV)
20.21 centuries later the church still faces many of the challenges the first century faced when confronted with the Great Commission to take the gospel to the entire world.

Take some time to finish the sentences below as they relate to your reaction and personal attitudes and understanding about mission work:
1. When someone brings up the topic of missions, I . . .
2. The idea of witnessing to a non-Adventist/Christian makes me . . .
3. For me, missions is about . . .

**did you know?**

Here are 6.7 billion people in the world today. Only 33 percent, or about 2.1 billion, are Christians (Catholics, Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelicals, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox, etc.). (See www.adherents.com for more info.)

The most densely populated areas of the world have the smallest Christian presence. It is called the 10/40 window. Do you know what countries and people groups are in this area?

There are more than 230 major languages and dialects in the world. The Adventist Church is spreading the good news in 75 languages (see www.awr.org). Check out www.adventistmission.org to learn more about our church's missions.

Jesus promised that the one sure sign of His return would be that the good news of salvation would be preached to each nation and then the end would come (Matt. 24:14).

**INTO THE STORY**

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

“News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ . . .

“The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues . . . They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos . . .

“From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia . . . From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.’ . . .

“As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath . . .

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord . . .

“When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

“The word of the Lord
“Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:25, 26, NIV).

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38, NIV).

“After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak’” (Acts 13:15, NIV).

“The word of the Lord spread through the whole region” (Acts 13:49, NIV).

“We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God.”—John Stott, British Christian leader.

“I hope you will be a missionary wherever your lot is cast . . . it makes but little difference after all where we spend these few fleeting years, if they are only spent for the glory of God. Be assured there is nothing else worth living for.”—Elizabeth Freeman, 19th-century American missionary to India.

“Some wish to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a Rescue Shop within a yard of hell.”—C. T. Studd, 19th-20th-century English missionary to China, India, Africa.
thread all humans share is the need for hope!

Missionaries cannot enter many places today due to political, religious, and geographic barriers. We still have to work at how we can contextualize the message for people of other cultures and ethnicities.

Whether you live in a city where you share the same or similar cultural backgrounds, or whether you live in the midst of a melting pot of ethnicities and cultures, how can you share this hope with your neighbors?

Tuesday

In the Flashlight section we see an explosive impact—and in a good way—of what happens when this message of hope and forgiveness is shared with individuals and within communities. While it is natural for us to cling together as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ—building each other up and growing in our faith—what is also clear from this reading by Ellen White is that we don’t just keep to ourselves. Healthy Christians and Christian communities are thrilled about the new hope and joy they have received in Christ, and they are zealous in spreading that joy to others. Look up the word “zealous.” Do you think of yourself or your church as being zealous in publishing the word throughout your community? What are some ways that you and/or your church express that zealosity for the Lord?

Wednesday

Here we get a glimpse of how the early church worked—at first, it was comprised of Jewish believers in Jesus, many of whom were dispersed from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, some of whom ended up in Antioch, a crossroads of the Roman Empire which turns out to be the launching point for missionary outreach. What Paul and Barnabas preached in another Antioch (Pisidian) was so dynamic that much of the whole town turned out the next Sabbath to hear them! So it has been throughout the history of the church, right down to today: What we say, and how we say it, can interest others in the message—and in the Savior!
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The story that frames this week’s lesson illustrates the central purpose of our mission and describes how we can negotiate through our problems with politics, personal preferences, traditions, and practices. By this time in the life of the church the Gentiles were breaking down the doors to know who Christ was, but some Jews felt strongly that in order to be a follower of Christ you must also be a good Jew. The practices and traditions of the Jews became so convoluted over time that it was hard for them to separate truth from tradition. So the church had a meeting—a “General Conference session” or board meeting to deal with the growing problems.

Paul, Barnabas, and Peter were in attendance while James presided over the meeting. The discussion was vigorous and passionate, because church and faith and eternal life are things that matter and are worth getting excited about. But in this storied moment, gospel minds prevail and embrace the basics of their faith with resolute conviction: the grace of Christ poured out at Calvary and made certain by the resurrection is a gift to all mankind, given freely and with no preference to race, gender, age, or social class. Another key feature that made this meeting so successful was the way Paul and Barnabas told stories of the miraculous way God was reaching the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). These stories sealed the meeting with a sense of renewed purpose and commitment to the gospel commission. This lesson can be a key moment to face the hard truth of politics and problems among believers; but moreover, to rekindle the heart of our mission through storytelling, and reminding ourselves why we are here.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• See how prejudice and preferences shape all people. (Know)
• Sense a unity of purpose based on God’s grace to all. (Feel)
• Choose to be devoted to the gospel commission. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Prejudice
• Church
• Missions

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Invite the students to share their responses to the voting activity in the What Do You Think? section. The voting activity should incite various opinions based upon their experience and perspective. To avoid stu-
Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Fritz Kreisler was born in 1875 and died in 1962. Kreisler was a world-famous violinist who earned a massive fortune by playing concerts and writing compositions. But surprisingly, Kreisler generously gave almost all of his fortune away. He was a brilliant musician, but equally renowned for being kind.

One day Kreisler discovered an exquisite violin but was unable to buy it because he no longer had such ample resources. He scrambled and saved and after raising enough money to meet the asking price, he found the seller, hoping to buy this amazing instrument. But his heart was crushed when he discovered it had been sold to a collector. So determined to continue and not give up, Kreisler made his way to the new owner’s home and offered to buy the violin. The collector quickly refused, saying the violin had become his prized possession and he could not sell it. Disappointed, Kreisler was about to leave when an idea came to him. “Might I play the instrument once more before this precious treasure gets confined to silence?” he asked. The owner mused and nodded, giving his permission. Kreisler then began to fill the room with such heart-moving music that it made an unmistakable effect on the owner. He was so deeply stirred in his heart by the music that he said, “I have no right to keep that to myself. It’s yours, Mr. Kreisler.” He continued, “Take it into the world, and let people hear it.”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

What lesson or truth do you think this story illustrates? What is the meaning of this story from the perspective of Kreisler? What about from the perspective of the man who bought the violin and who was just going to keep it on display? What does this story teach us about how we should function as individual believers? How should we live as a body or a church?

Kreisler came to the same conclusion that many of the New Testament believers came to, and that was: there is something that is worth everything. The early church had problems, but their biggest problem was the amazing growth and impact they were having on the region. As a result, problems emerged. Read the story of how this band of believers functioned as a church.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them:

• Read the story and underline what you think are key phrases to understanding what this passage is about.
• Draw a circle around all the individuals and people groups mentioned in this story.
• Describe what you see as the social and religious dynamics that are going on in the New Testament church at this time.
• Who are these “certain men” who demanded that Gentile believers be circumcised? What do you see as their spiritual focus?
• Why did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, and why do you think they went through Gentile territory on their way to counsel with the apostles in Jerusalem?
• What is the yoke that Peter referred to in verse 10?
• After Peter spoke to the assembled leaders of the Christian church, Paul and Barnabas added their stories of Gentile believers they had met in their journeys. How do you think these stories impressed the congregation? How are such stories important to the decisions we make?
• What do you think God is trying to say to us today in this story?

More Questions for Teachers:

• When people work together for a cause that is worthwhile, there will be differences. How have you seen these differences tear churches apart or bring them together?
• The center of the controversy was about the whether the Gentiles should keep the traditions of the Jews (eating meat that was kosher, keeping the festivals, etc.) as part of their faith in Christ. How much of that is what Christ called them to teach (Matthew 28:19, 20) and how much was about getting them to conform?
• What traditions do you have in your culture that
may not transfer to another?
• Is there a biblical principle behind what you do and why you do it?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Matthew 20; Matthew 21; Acts 7:51, 52; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians; Revelation 14:12; 12:17.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

It is likely that more than 10 years had passed since Christ ascended into heaven, and the church was growing by leaps and bounds. Peter and James were focused on teaching and reteaching the Jews and those closely connected with the faith of Israel. Paul and Barnabas set out to share the gospel with those who were not Jews, but Gentiles.

By this time there was somewhat of a structure and an agreed-upon process for the problems the young church faced. There had been seasons of famine and shortage of money. There were certain groups that felt neglected (Acts 6). On one hand there was the blossoming church filled with disciples of Jesus and the resident leadership of Pharisees and Sadducees. The adversarial elements that fought against Christ had not gone away and would need to be addressed (especially in light of Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 and Stephen’s rebuke in Acts 7). So arguments would arise.

Tips for Top-notch Teaching

From PowerPoint to Story

Storytelling. This theme will return again and again if you are hearing anything master teachers are saying about how people learn. The most pervasive, memorable teaching tool other than personal experience is through story. In fact, entire corporations are moving away from PowerPoint presentations and bullet-listed charts and graphics to telling stories in their boardrooms. Why? Because people don’t change because of facts. They are transformed through experience, and storytellers usher you into the realm of thinking and feeling that is beyond becoming convinced something is true; they are convicted to live by it.

Look at this week’s lesson and see how Paul and Barnabas turned this heated meeting around with stories from the front lines (Acts 15:12).

One of the basic arguments centered around food. It was common for food to be used in religious rituals but then sold in the market afterward. Then there was the manner in which food was prepared. God instructed the Jews to slaughter the animals that they would eat in such a way that the blood was drained from the animal. Disease (and in the minds of Jews—

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
sin) was carried through the blood. But Gentiles who became believers in Jesus had no experience nor did they see the need to practice such things, and thus, controversy ensued.

The controversy in our story this week was held by “Judaizers,” who held that in order for Gentile believers to become “true members of Israel” they had to be circumcised. Maybe the prejudices and tensions between Jews and Gentiles were still so strong that these little arguments were simply tangible ways to vent their prejudice. Either way, controversies are always a part of any group:

“In every society or organized group of people two types are always represented: the conservative, looking to the past, and the progressive, looking toward the future. The ultra Jewish element in the church held that there could be no salvation outside of Israel; hence, that all the Gentile disciples must receive circumcision and observe the Jewish regulations” (The Story of the Christian Church, Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, p. 26).

But this story is a testimony to how the church can stay on track and focused on mission in the midst of problems. They overcame this problem by: (1) Peter’s reminder of how God’s grace comes to all people the same way, through faith; (2) Paul and Barnabas’ heart-warming stories of the miracles God was doing on behalf of the Gentile world; (3) James, the leader of the church at that time, taking a bold stand for the heart of the mission instead of letting little problems sidetrack the church. What might this look like today?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Give each student a 3x5 card or a small piece of paper and something to write with. Then give the following instructions:

“We are a church, and we forget sometimes about what matters most to Christ. But we need to move forward and be able to agree upon what our mission is. So I want you to write out in 30 words or less what you think our mission is as a local church. Begin.”

When they are done, set all the statements where everyone can see them. Then you can debrief with them:

“What were some common elements you saw in all the statements of mission? What were some of the most obvious differences? Now if we were to condense these together and agree upon one statement to work toward, what might be different in this church?”

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

This week’s story is not at first the brightest portrayal of Christians—arguing over whether the outsiders (Gentiles) should be circumcised or not. It seems petty, but it was a real issue then. How they negotiated through it as a body of believers is what is truly inspiring! They found the core of what they were all about. They reminded themselves how they became disciples of Christ. Peter must have remembered how many times he stumbled—now he was a leader. James, the brother of Jesus, had his share of problems. Paul listed his in his letter. All of these people returned to the basic beliefs they knew to be true and worked together. Peter gave his remarks. Paul and Barnabas told stories. James closed the issue and refocused everyone back on the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. What part will you play in this church today?

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 19, 20, 21.
us and them


flashlight

“The traditions and maxims of men must not take the place of revealed truth. The advance of the gospel message must not be hindered by the prejudices and preferences of men, whatever might be their position in the church” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 200).

keytext

“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

(Acts 15:10, 11, NIV)
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

___ “Holding to human traditions is more of a problem in the church today than racial prejudice.”

___ “Legalism is more deadly to church life than apathy.”

How do the issues the church faces also reflect the problems the human race faces? Explain your response.

______________________________________

______________________________________

____________________________________

The word used to describe anyone who was not a Jew was “Gentile.” The Greek word “ethnos” (where we get the word “ethnic”) refers to nations or people, but the distinction Jews made heightened national or ethnic differences. God’s purpose was to use the Jews as an entry point to bring the knowledge of the true God into all the world. Instead, many simply accepted the privilege and not the purpose, which led to the creation of “insiders” (Jews) and “everyone else” (Gentiles).

“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’ This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

“The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.’

“The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.’

“The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up. ‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘listen to me. Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things.” ’”

(Acts 15:1-17, NIV)
“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16, NIV).

“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations” (Psalm 22:27, 28, NIV).

“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3, NIV).

“In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring” (Romans 9:8, NIV).

“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29, NIV).

“I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do His work through me.”—J. Hudson Taylor, 19th-century English missionary to China.

“The world is far more ready to receive the gospel than Christians are to hand it out.”—George W. Peters, theologian and professor of world missions.

“I have but one candle to burn, and would rather burn it out where people are dying in darkness than in a land which is flooded with lights.”—An anonymous missionary.
makingitreal

Sabbath

Read and respond to the voting exercise in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. This week’s lesson deals with several themes: prejudice, gospel mission, legalism, church politics, and more. The closer you get to the lives of new disciples and to church life and mission, the more you see the problems. Perhaps one of the greatest problems they had to overcome was their prejudices about traditions. How have you found that still to be true today? But how do we break out of our rut? What changes do you think must be made in our hearts and minds before we can see others differently?

Through the lens of God’s grace we see the people of the world not as different people with different problems, but as possibilities. How do you react when you hear mission stories or testimonies of people coming to find Christ?

Tuesday

Read the quote in the Flashlight section and see if you can find anyone who disagrees with it in principle. But in practice, how do you define and distinguish “traditions” from helpful practices of the Christian life? Everyone has their preferences and prejudices, but how do we look past those and give our effort to the task of reaching the lost? What are some of your prejudices and preferences that you should be aware of?

Whom do you know who can put their preferences behind them for the greater cause of bringing people to Christ? How do they do it?

Wednesday

The Punch Lines in this week’s lesson focus on the relationship between believers and unbelievers—or those who haven’t yet heard the gospel. If you had to address a room full of missionaries that were going out to share the message of Christ to your part of the world. Check the verse in the list of five that you think would be the most helpful or important to share with them? Star the verse that speaks to you personally today as you think about your friends who don’t know Christ as their personal Savior. Perhaps you could pray today for an opening, a window to share your personal experience of God’s saving grace to someone else.

Thursday

This week’s lesson captures the drama that comes as a result of many people working for a meaningful cause. There wouldn’t be problems if the task didn’t mean so much to the people involved. So as you look at the problems your church faces today—the big problems like the issues the New Testament church faced—what can you do to be helpful? One of the things that helped Paul and Barnabas and James and Peter sort this problem out was the reminder to stay focused on the mission.

If you were to say what the mission of your church is in 50 words or less, what would you say? Write your mission statement out based on what you believe and know to be true, and keep it before you in your Bible or where you can see it every day as a reminder.

Friday

Read this story and imagine the faces of James, the brother of Jesus, Peter, and the new guys Paul and Barnabas. Imagine a whole boardroom of believers, deacons, and elders. Many of them have full-time jobs and shops, or might be unemployed now that they have become Christians. There are no “Bibles,” only people writing letters and connecting stories of old to the amazing things that are currently happening. Was church then and church today really all that different? In what ways? In what ways will it always be the same?


this week’s reading*

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The call to share the good news of God’s forgiveness and His gift of salvation is a personal call (Isaiah 6:1-9). Two thousand years ago we received the Great Commission to go into the entire world to preach the gospel to all peoples and to make disciples of the nations. This world is not some untouched corner of the Amazon jungle. This world is our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplace, our friends, our families. It is also a world in which half the population lives in urban areas as of 2009 and about 70 percent will be city dwellers by 2050.1

Ellen White’s words resonate with as much relevance today as they did years ago: “The Greeks sought after wisdom, yet the message of the cross was to them foolishness because they valued their own wisdom more highly than the wisdom that comes from above” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 240). This begets the question of how we can share the gospel in this increasingly urban world imbued with hubris from an overabundance of information, technology, and medical advancements.

Our youth live in a culture that espouses living and believing whatever you want as long as it is right for you. Truth has become relative. That is why simply teaching our kids to believe in the right things isn’t going to be enough to enable them to stand strong and make right choices in today’s culture. It is critical that our youth are taught skills that will empower them to be firmly grounded in the Word of God. This will strengthen them spiritually, morally, and emotionally to stand firm against a world in which philosophies of pluralism and relativism impact them in a very real way. Ellen White emphasizes: “The messengers of the cross must arm themselves with watchfulness and prayer, and move forward with faith and courage, working always in the name of Jesus” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 230). Our youth need to be so thoroughly convinced of the truth that they will take a stand for it regardless of the consequences.

In these times of loneliness and despair, we have been given a great and precious gift. It is our God-given responsibility to stay undeterred and keep sharing the message of freedom and an abundant life to a world crying out for hope and belonging.

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Recognize some of the barriers to accepting and believing God’s message of salvation. (Know)
- Experience the urgency to be firmly grounded in their beliefs so that they are prepared to face the inevitable challenges that come with following God’s command to spread His message of salvation. (Feel)
- Adopt Bible study skills and apply them to deepen their knowledge and understanding of God. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
- Evangelism/outreach and service
- Conviction/knowing God
- How to witness
- Communication

www.cornerstoneconnections.net
You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

**TEACHING**

I. GETTING STARTED

**Activity**

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses and guide them to understand the concept of how beliefs influence our behaviors through the following activity:

In the novel *Sophie’s Choice*, by William Styron, a Polish woman, Sophie Zawistowska, is arrested by the Nazis and sent to the Auschwitz death camp. Upon arriving, she must make a choice: one of her children will be spared the gas chamber if she chooses which one. She must choose or lose both.

Divide the class into pairs and have them discuss what Sophie should do, and then share their thoughts with the rest of the class. What did they base their decision on?

Now introduce a belief about action related to the story: After much anguish, Sophie finally makes a choice. She chooses her daughter who is smaller and younger to be sent to her death because she believes that her son, being older and stronger, would have a better chance of surviving the rigors of internment and war.

If you shared this belief, how would it affect the decision you made?

**Illustration**

Share this illustration in your words with your class:

There is a ministry called Bible League that provides Bibles and plants churches in many war-torn or impoverished places, to people who “hunger and thirst” for God’s Word. People such as Asei, a former Muslim who accepted Jesus as her Savior after a Bible League worker shared God’s Word with her. Kagiso, from South Africa, studied the Bible every day and later brought her parents into the knowledge of Christ, too. Marjan’ broke away from the hold that occultist practices had on him through studying God’s Word diligently.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

**Bridge to the Story**

Share the following in your own words:

Followers of God believe that the Bible is more than just a book. God’s people value the power that the Bible imparts. We believe that the Word of God is not only useful in challenging non-Christians on their worldview, but also for us to challenge ourselves concerning our own views.

If you wanted to read the Bible now, where would be the nearest place you could get one? Your home? Your desk? Or even in your schoolbag? In many countries, it’s easy to get hold of a Bible. However, in many other places, Bibles are hard to come by, and Christians living there either have to travel very far to read the Bible or face persecution if caught with one. In places such as these, people value the Bible and treasure every opportunity they can get to read it.

How important is the Bible for you? If you had to walk for an hour to get to a Bible, would you still go to read it?

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- Circle the different cities mentioned in this story. What happened at each venue?
- In every place, Paul preached God’s Word blatantly, with passion and courage. However, he achieved varying degrees of success. What can we learn from this?
- The people in Athens were not uneducated. They valued the pursuit of knowledge. They spent “all their time discussing the latest ideas.” Why, then, did they reject the truth that Paul was sharing with them? What did their actions reveal about their beliefs and values?
- What lesson from this story will you apply to your life?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story:

- **Mark 16:15**—God divinely commissioned everyone who has ever heard or read this command to “preach the gospel” and draw people into following Him. What does it mean to “preach the gospel”?
- **Matthew 7:24-26**—In this story of the wise and foolish builders, Christ uses this analogy of house building to describe two categories of people. On the surface, both houses appear the
same but without the right foundation (James 3:13-17) their end can be disastrous. A good foundation is daily obedience (Psalm 111:10), service, Bible study, and prayer. What kind of foundation are you building your “house” on?

**Sharing Context and Background**

Use the following information to shed more light on specific aspects of the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. **Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens.** Thessalonica was one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in Macedonia. Athens was the center for Greek culture, philosophy, and education. According to *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Berea was a “small Macedonian city about 50 miles southwest of Thessalonica. The city was of far less commercial importance than Thessalonica” (vol. 6, p. 344). Are there any similarities in the way Paul’s preaching was received and the way God’s Word is received in today’s megacities?

2. **The Stoics and the Epicureans.** The Stoics valued logic over emotions and, as a result, they attempted to attain a harmonious life by suppressing their desire for pleasure. In contrast, the Epicureans valued the pursuit of happiness or pleasure as the primary goal in life. What values did Christ impart and how was that reflected in His actions while on earth?

3. **“May we know?”** *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* sheds light on the nuance of this question: “An idiomatic expression, which may here be rendered: ‘Is it possible for us to know?’”—a question that may have been courteous, sarcastic, or ironical. The Epicureans and Stoics had no doubts about their own ability to understand all that Paul might say to them but they were obviously eager to hear about his strange teaching” (vol. 6, p. 349). What are your beliefs or notions about God and the Bible? Are they derived from hearsay or diligent and humble self-study?

4. **Dionysius, Damaris, and a number of others.**

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**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

*Be Prepared.*

Allocate at least one hour each week for lesson preparation. The more you prepare, the better your Sabbath School lesson will go for both you and your students.

This teachers’ guide was prepared to make your job easier, so use it. Make an effort to understand how the lesson develops. How does one activity lead into another? What is the purpose of the various questions? When you analyze and understand the different elements, you can own and adapt the lesson with increased effectiveness.

Where possible, attend training sessions for Sabbath School teachers. When you are trained for a task, you feel more competent, understand how to do it well, and enjoy doing it more.

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**Teaching From . . .**

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Other Eyes**
  
  *Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

- **Flashlight**
  
  *Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.*

- **Punch Lines**
  
  *Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.*

  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.

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Although the majority of people in Athens did not accept and believe Paul’s words, there were a few who believed. As a result, a church was founded. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary proposes that the church in 2 Corinthians 1:1 (“the saints which are all in Achaia”) is the result of the conversion that Dionysius and the others experienced. What can you infer about God’s plans from this?

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with this activity and debrief it in your own words.

Gather the class for a role-playing session.

Hand out four or five scenarios to the groups (e.g., using another person’s belongings without permission; being an unpopular, bullied child; someone the class dislikes wanting to join in your game; your close friends deciding to do something you do not agree with).

Ask each group to create a short role play to enact the scene without considering the words of Jesus. Then ask the groups to create another short role play on the same scenario but this time keeping in line with the values that Jesus espouses.

Discuss the main differences between the scenes.

Summary

Share the following summary in your own words:

When there are no standards, everybody thinks they are right, and there can be a lot of misunderstanding and arguments. It’s difficult to compare anything unless you have a standard of comparison. The Bible is the standard to evaluate the Christian’s life.

When we compare ourselves with God’s law, with God, and with Christ, we realize that none of us measures up. None of us can meet His standards. We learn what the wise thing to do is, as well as the unwise. The Bible is a standard for living. But in order to live our lives accordingly, we need to know the standards from our personal experience. We need to look to Christ, read the Bible, and search the truth for ourselves and not simply rely on the hearsay of others.

However, no matter how far we fall short, Jesus has already bridged the gap between us and God so that He can accept us according to His standard of righteousness.

1 www.bible-league.org/blcorp/changedlives/article.asp?id=211.
1 www.bible-league.org/blcorp/changedlives/article.asp?id=203.
1 www.bible-league.org/blcorp/changedlives/article.asp?id=212.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 22, 23, 24.
believe + values = action

flashlight

“In every effort to reach the higher classes, the worker for God needs strong faith. Appearances may seem forbidding, but in the darkest hour there is light above. The strength of those who love and serve God will be renewed day by day. The understanding of the Infinite is placed at their service, that in carrying out His purposes they may not err. Let these workers hold the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end, remembering that the light of God’s truth is to shine amid the darkness that enshrouds our world” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 242).

keytext

“This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won’t be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching.”

(Ephesians 4:13, 14, NLT)
what
do you think?

In his book *Kingdom Education*, Dr. Glen Schultz says: “At the foundation of a person’s life, we find his beliefs. These beliefs shape his values, and his values drive his actions.”

Define belief and values in your own words.

Belief is _______________________________

Values are _______________________________

did you know?

Josh D. McDowell, Bob Hostetler, and David H. Bellis, authors of *Beyond Belief to Convictions*, conclude from many studies (including their own) that young people who lack a basic biblical belief system and/or have distorted beliefs about God, truth, and the Bible are:

- 225 percent more likely to be angry with life
- 216 percent more likely to be resentful
- 210 percent more likely to lack purpose in life
- 200 percent more likely to be disappointed in life

Correlating evidence reveals that young people with distorted beliefs are:

- 36 percent more likely to lie to a friend
- 48 percent more likely to cheat on an exam
- 200 percent more likely to steal
- 200 percent more likely to physically hurt someone
- 300 percent more likely to use illegal drugs
- 600 percent more likely to attempt suicide

Interestingly, regardless of their spiritual affinity, they “want a healthy, relationally significant life on earth and a home in heaven.”

Jesus and his resurrection, they said, ‘What’s this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he’s picked up?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.’

“Then they took him to the high council of the city. ‘Come and tell us about this new teaching,’ they said. ‘You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it’s all about.’ (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

“So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: ‘Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: “To an Unknown God.” This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about. . . .

‘God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.’

“When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, ‘We want to hear more about this later.’ That ended Paul’s discussion with them, but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

(Acts 17:10-12, 16-23, 30-34, NLT)
List all the people and groups that responded positively to Paul’s efforts. Next, list the ones who rejected him. What were the differences in attitude or beliefs that led to the different outcomes?

Compare the people in Berea with the people in Thessalonica and Athens. When people talk to me about God and the Bible, which group do I most resemble?

Paul was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw in the city. Do we find ourselves troubled by the godlessness around us? Should we be? Explain.

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

What does Paul’s discussion with the Athenians tell us about how we should relate to nonbelievers?

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11, NIV).

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

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18, NIV).

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, NIV).

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17, NIV).

“You know more about your ledgers than your Bible; you know more about your magazines and novels than what God has written; many of you will read a novel from the beginning to the end, and what have you got? A mouthful of foam when you are done. But you cannot read the Bible; that solid, lasting, substantial, and satisfying food goes uneaten, locked up in the cupboard of neglect; while anything that a man writes, a best seller of the day, is greedily devoured.” — Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 19th-century English preacher.
Sabbath

Do you agree or disagree with Dr Schultz’s statement in the What Do You Think? section? Do you find that faith and spiritual values influence the choices you make in your life? If so, how?

The goal of our relationships with God and others is one of maturity. The Key Text shares how that maturity is achieved: through unity in our faith and our knowledge of Jesus. How are these attributes expressed in our relationships?

Sunday

As you read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section, ask yourself: What did I learn that was new and I didn’t know before? How does this change the way I relate to God and the Bible?

What does this text tell you about God? What does this text tell you about you? What does this text tell you about your relationship with God?

Monday

Break down this week’s Key Text into a list of benefits that come from having an intimate relationship with God. The depth of a relationship is evidenced in the intimacy and trust we have with the other person. Until we come to know God personally, a relationship with Him will simply be a vague concept. How would you describe your relationship with God? As a vague concept or a reality enacted in your daily communications with Him?

Tuesday

Read the quote in the Flashlight section of this week’s lesson. Then read Acts 18:1-17. What conclusions can you draw about God’s promises?

How can these Punch Lines help you to be “mature in the Lord”?

Wednesday

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

Thursday

A personal testimony of your life-changing relationship with God is very powerful in underscoring His message of love and forgiveness. Prepare your personal testimony of how you became a Christian and practice it by sharing with the class. Keep it to three minutes, using the following outline:

- Before—What my life was like before I got to know Christ
- During—How I came to trust Christ
- After—In what ways I am different now

Friday

People invest time and energy into attaining better grades, developing their career, their bodies, and relationships, but often neglect the spiritual dimension of their lives. How do you invest time and energy into growing your relationship with God?


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this week’s reading*


I. SYNOPSIS

Paul had a complicated mission. He was sent to teach the Gentiles about Jesus and His sacrifice, people who did not know God at all. He had a responsibility to show them the character of Jesus in a way that they would understand. He had to give “milk” to the baby Christians and more solid sustenance to the more mature believers. He had to balance encouragement with reprimands for bad behavior. He had to meet the needs of people from every walk of life. It certainly was not an easy calling!

One of the basic doctrines that Paul felt was important to teach was that of Jesus’ second coming. He wanted to encourage the new believers with the knowledge that Jesus would come again, the dead would be raised, and all those who accepted Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf would live forever with Him.

When we have heard the good news repeatedly, the effect seems to wear off. Many of us do not fully appreciate what this really means in our lives. Many of us have been raised since infants knowing that Jesus will come again, but we fail to see what life would be like without that hope. In fact, we seem to take it for granted.

When we can see what God is really giving us, it gives us a new realization of our responsibility toward others in their spiritual walks. Service becomes central to our lives, and we realize that how we represent God matters immensely in the lives of unbelievers or baby Christians.

II. TARGET

The students will:
- Understand why the good news really is so good. (Know)
- Sense a responsibility toward others in their spiritual walk. (Feel)
- Choose to see the service opportunities as well as the difference that our hope in Jesus gives us. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Second coming of Christ
- Service

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

**Activity**

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Ask the students to imagine that there is no hope after they die. Let them imagine that Jesus is not coming again and that once we die there is nothing else.

What would they do differently in their lives if this were the case? Would they feel a responsibility toward others? How would they feel about helping others? How would they feel about their relationships, knowing that nothing would last longer than life on this earth?
Now, let them imagine that they are being told “the good news” that Jesus is coming, and that there is hope for living eternally? How would they feel now?

**Illustration**

*Share this illustration in your own words:*

There was a young teacher in an inner-city school. She felt frustrated because the students just didn’t seem to care about learning. She felt as if she were beating her head against the wall. Every other week, when she left school to drive home, she would find her car vandalized.

She knew that her students were angry because they were poor. They were disrespected. They felt like the world was against them. While she was tempted to be angry at the students who ravaged her car, she realized that their anger wasn’t at her so much as it was at the world. She decided to use their anger to help them learn.

The next day she made a deal with her class. If every single student in her class scored 80 percent or higher, she would permit them to “egg” her car as much as they liked for one day. If they scored 90 percent or higher, she would allow them to slash her tires until they looked like rubber bands! The students agreed, amused at the teacher’s tactic.

True to their word, they didn’t vandalize the car again that semester. Instead, they studied as hard as they could. At the end of the semester, the teacher was delighted to find that every single student scored over 90 percent!

The week before, the teacher’s old car gave out and she had to replace it with a new car. But she wouldn’t take back her promise. The students joyfully demolished her car! The car was never the same again. It smelled like rotten eggs forever after that day. But the teacher saw it as a reminder of how her students had finally learned!

**II. TEACHING THE STORY**

**Bridge to the Story**

*Share the following in your own words:*

Paul had some difficult students to teach as well. He had people from all walks of life, from every religious background, all looking to him to learn about this Jewish Messiah who came for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It wasn’t easy, but just like the young teacher he had to find a way to reach these people where they were. There were specific things that Paul felt were important for these baby Christians to understand.

**Out of the Story for Teachers**

*After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- What is the reason for Paul’s letter?
- What things does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do in their spiritual growth?
- Why do you think Paul’s explanation of what will happen at the Second Coming was so important to these people?
- How would it have affected their lives on a personal level to have this information? How would they see things differently?
- How might this knowledge change how they feel? How would it encourage them?
- If you had no hope of a resurrection in Jesus, how would it change your outlook on life?

**Additional Questions for Teachers**

- What practical advice did Paul have for the Thessalonians?
- What positive reinforcement did Paul give them?
- In what ways can we see Paul being gentle with them?
- What encouragement did he give?

*Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 13.*

**Sharing Context and Background**

*Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.*

Thessalonica was a principle city in Macedonia as well as a primary port. It was founded in 316 B.C., during the reign of Alexander the Great. It became a very important city under the Roman rule as well. The Christian church there was the second church founded in Europe, and Paul wrote this letter from Athens in A.D. 51 or 52. Acts 18 tells us a little bit surrounding the time that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written.

Paul had great success in winning converts to Christianity, but he also faced great opposition. He had to leave the new Thessalonian church before it had become firmly established because of the opposition. He was worried for the new converts, though,
Tips for Top-notch Teaching

A Safe Environment
Here is a tip for dealing with teens, taken from author Kelley Renz:
“Be trustworthy. Don’t go telling others what was said in your youth group meetings. Of course, if any abuse or dangerous behavior/words are shared, you have an obligation to take those to appropriate adults, but other than this, handle your sharing with integrity.”

Teens will feel more comfortable sharing what they think if they know that what they say won’t be immediately reported back to their parents or used as a humorous anecdote later on. Everyone needs to feel secure that they won’t be made fun of or reprimanded for their honest opinions.

afraid that they would be persecuted. Paul sent Timothy to them to encourage them and to report back to Him on how they were doing. When Timothy reported back that the new converts were standing firm in their faith, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, his letter to them.

Paul was writing to this new church to encourage them to live holy lives. He wrote 2 Thessalonians not long after 1 Thessalonians as a “PS” of sorts, explaining what they had misunderstood. Mainly, they thought that Jesus would return in their lifetimes, and they were afraid that those who died before the event would not inherit eternal life. So in 1 Thessalonians, Paul addressed this issue.

In the Thessalonians’ zeal for the gospel, and to demonstrate their belief that Jesus’ coming was in the very near future, some of the members of the church stopped working their professions. They would have been a burden to those who were still working and an object of ridicule for unbelievers. This situation needed to be dealt with. So Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, insisting that they needed to continue working their regular jobs and not wait idly for Jesus to return. Paul outlined some of the things that had to take place before Jesus would return, namely the coming of the antichrist.

These letters to the Thessalonians give us a good view into what the early Christians were taught regarding some important doctrines, such as the resurrection. Many people worry that we have moved away from the original teachings of Christianity, but by reading Paul’s letters to the early churches, we are able to see exactly what Paul taught.

III. CLOSING

Activity
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Ask the students to each think of a time or situation that makes them long for Jesus to come. Perhaps it is when they see horrible things happening on the

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

• Other Eyes
Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

• Flashlight
Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

• Punch Lines
Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.

Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
news on TV. Or maybe they long for Jesus to come when someone close to them dies or is in pain. Discuss these situations as well as what kinds of feelings they have surrounding them. Read the Key Text and say the following: “This verse tells us to encourage each other with these words. How do these words encourage you?”

**Summary**

*Share the following thoughts in your own words:*

Paul was teaching some new Christians some very important lessons about living a Christian life, and about our hope of Jesus coming again. Everyone is at a different level in their relationship with Jesus. Being a beginner doesn’t make a person less important or less loved, but it does give us a special responsibility to encourage and support that person. Sometimes we have the urge to judge someone by their actions or attitudes, but if we remember that they might be at a different level of understanding or at a different place in their relationship with God, we can be more patient and deal with them differently.

In all of our lives, it is comforting to remember that Jesus IS coming, and that the pain and sadness of this world will NOT last. Stick with it! Things are going to get better!

* Fundamental Belief No. 25.

Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 25, 26.
“Paul had necessarily adapted his manner to teaching to the condition of the church. ‘I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual,’ he afterward explained to them, ‘but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.’ 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2.

Many of the Corinthian believers had been slow to learn the lessons that he was endeavoring to teach them. . . . However wise they might be in worldly knowledge, they were but babes in the knowledge of Christ” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 271).
Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

___ I don’t think about Jesus coming again very often—it’s too far away.

___ I don’t think that Jesus’ second coming affects my life right now. 

___ Knowing that Jesus will come again and let me live for eternity makes me take things in life more seriously.

___ I believe that when I die, it is not the end for me, and that I will be reunited with the people I love who believed in Jesus.

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As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you

However, since that survey was conducted, the percentage of the population who attend church each week has dropped to around 20 percent. (Accessed at www.harrisable.com/vault/Harris-Interactive-Poll-Research-While-Most-Americans-Believe-in-God-Only-36-pct-A-2003-10.pdf on June 19, 2013.)
“And I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (Acts 24:15, 16, NIV).

“For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?” (Romans 8:24, NIV).

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV).

“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:18, NIV).

“Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold” (2 Corinthians 3:12, NIV).

“In the world to come, I shall not be asked, ‘Why were you not Moses?’ I shall be asked, ‘Why were you not Zusya?’”—Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol, 18th-century Hasidic master and hero of Hasidic folktales.

“The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity—activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man.”—Ernest Becker, 20th-century American anthropologist.

“Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.”—C. S. Lewis, 20th-century English novelist and essayist.
Sabbath
Sometimes we hear about Jesus’ second coming so often that we stop feeling how important it is. Yes, yes, we know. Jesus is coming... But think about it today. What if Jesus weren’t coming? What if death were the end? What if we would never see our loved ones again, and after they were gone, we had to say goodbye forever? What if your eventual death would be the absolute end of you, and your life on earth had no meaning beyond the few years you spent here? What a depressing thought! When you really think about it, Jesus coming again and raising us back to life is good news! How do you think that Jesus’ coming again affects you today?

Sunday
Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12, NIV).

Think about Paul’s advice to the Thessalonians. How can you lead a life that will win the respect of the people around you? Is there a difference between winning people’s respect and being popular?

Monday
First Thessalonians 4:16-18 tells how Jesus will come and raise the dead. Paul advises us to encourage each other with this knowledge. How can we encourage others with the knowledge that there is something more than life on earth? Is there a way to tell others about this without seeming like a street preacher? What can you do in your own personal life that will show others that there is more to life than just the here and now?

Tuesday
Ellen White explains how Paul had to adapt his preaching to reach people at different levels of their spiritual development. The Corinthians were baby Christians, and they needed a different approach than mature Christians would need. Paul said they still needed milk. That didn’t mean that they were of less value or lower in status. We don’t believe that babies matter less than we do; in fact, we give them more care and attention because they are so vulnerable! Do you take your friends’ level of spiritual interest into account when you talk to them about your life with God? Would you consider yourself a mature Christian yet? What can you do to grow in your spiritual experience?

Wednesday
The verses in the Punch Lines talk about hope and what hope does for us in our lives. What hope do you have because of your belief in Jesus? How has that hope for forgiveness, heaven, and eternal life changed your life? How is your life different than someone else’s life who might live without the hope you have? Hope gives us the courage to step out and try more than we ever thought we could! What do you think God wants you to try today?

Thursday
We can see from Paul’s way of approaching the Thessalonians and the Corinthians that he was willing to adjust himself to meet the needs of the people. While God wants us to be true to who He created us to be, and while He does not want us to compromise our beliefs or ethics, He does want us to be flexible in the service of others. Everyone has different needs. Some people could just use a smile. Others could use an honest, friendly conversation. Others might need something as elemental as a warm meal or a secondhand coat. Try to see others as an opportunity for service. What needs can you meet?

Friday
Life is not just about the 70-odd years we might spend on this planet. It isn’t about getting as much money as possible, or about experiencing as much as possible. While God certainly wants us to live our lives to the fullest, we aren’t supposed to do that at the expense of others. After studying this week, do you feel differently about the fact that Jesus is going to come again to raise the dead and bring us to live with Him? Do you see life any differently? What responsibility do you feel toward others in their spiritual experience?

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*unlikely leaders is a special adaptation of the Acts of the Apostle created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.ULiHFrJ6O0s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
the uncool minority

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Paul had to face great opposition when preaching the gospel. God not only used Paul to work miracles to guide the pagan population back to the true God, but He also gave him the courage he needed to face immense confrontation. Paul had to stand for what he knew was right, even if he had mobs chasing him down!

This lesson examines the courage of those who were willing to stand up for what was right in the face of an offended, angry majority. The majority was prejudiced against the Christian movement. Some hated Paul because he was affecting their profit in the sale of idols. Some hated Paul because he was adding to the Jewish belief system, a threat to the established power structure. Others had no personal reason to dislike Paul at all, but simply joined in on the public fervor, unwilling to be outside the safety of the majority’s approval.

God never said that standing for the right would make us popular or part of the majority’s clique. God did tell us, though, that He would be with us, that He would provide us with courage, and that we would be rewarded for our faith.

Facing opposition is never easy. It’s never comfortable. God never asks us to face opposition for no reason, either. There are people without the strength to stand up who need a champion. There are people loaded down with questions who need to see an answer in your relationship with God.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand how a relationship with God gives us courage to face opposition. (Know)
- Sense a responsibility to stand for what the Holy Spirit tells us we must stand for. (Feel)
- Choose to live life courageously, living life to the fullest with God as our support. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Courage
- Prejudice

You will find material to help you explore these and other topics with your students at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Give the students a list of causes and ask them to prioritize them. The first should be the one they would be willing to die for, and the last should be the one they simply don’t care about. Examples of causes could be: world peace, a cure for cancer, environmental issues, freedom of religion, rehabilitating criminals, educating people on the dangers of smoking, etc.

After the students have put the causes into the order that best represents their personal feelings, ask them why they ordered them the way they did. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. This
is meant to get them thinking about their own priorities and values.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks paid her fare and boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus home from work one night. She worked at a department store as a seamstress, and she was thankful to sink into a seat.

According to municipal law, Blacks and Whites were segregated in virtually every aspect of everyday life. On buses there were “colored sections” where non-White people were permitted to sit. When the “White section” filled up, the people sitting in the “colored section” were expected to give up their seats.

On this particular night, some Caucasian people boarded the bus and the bus driver, James Blake, ordered the four people seated in the “colored section” to vacate their seats. Three of them stood up, but Rosa Parks did not. Instead she scooted in to the window seat. When the bus driver asked her why she would not stand, she said, “I don’t think I should have to.”

“Are you going to stand up?” he asked.

“No,” she said.

“If you don’t, I’ll call the police and have you arrested,” he said.

“You may do that,” she replied. The police were called, and she was arrested.

Many years later, Mrs. Parks commented on that night: “People always say that I didn’t give up my seat because I was tired, but that’s not true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was 42. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in.”

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Rosa Parks has gone down in history as a woman who was willing to “sit down” for what was right. Because of Mrs. Parks, and other courageous people like her, great advances were made in human rights. Generations after her have grown up in a much different America because of her decision not to give in.

God needs courageous people who are willing to stand up for what is right in the seemingly unimportant situations like a bus ride. He needs people who are not willing to compromise their beliefs or the peace of their conscience.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

• What was the reason for Demetrius’ behavior toward Paul?
• Do you think that Paul was aware of why the city had been thrown into an uproar?
• Do you think that the city clerk was courageous in facing the mob? Why or why not?
• What do you think had a calming effect on the crowd?
• In the mob, it says that “most of the people did not even know why they were there.” What made them follow the group in this show of rage?

Additional Questions for Teachers

• Who began the riot, and why?
• Why do you think the majority of the people went along with the mob?
• Who acted in a courageous way? Defend your choice.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Isaiah 44:6-23; Exodus 20:1-4.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was built in 559 B.C., and there is evidence of earlier temples being built on the same site as early as the Bronze Age. Ephesus was an economically vibrant area, and merchants from all over Asia Minor were drawn to the temple of Artemis. The temple was constructed over a period of 220 years and was made of pure marble. Inside the temple was an idol of Artemis that, the story was told, had fallen from heaven. Some have suggested that the idol was carved out of an asteroid that “fell from heaven” and hit the earth.

The worship of Artemis was a very lucrative business. A large number of priests and priestesses lived in the temple. Coins were minted there and banking transactions were carried out. Festivities were celebrated each May in honor of the goddess’s birthday,
Artemis. He would have made a good amount of money from the many tourists, devotees, and pilgrims who came through Ephesus to see the magnificent temple and worship there.

Paul was preaching a dangerous message. He was preaching that idols could not aid their worshippers and that there was one God who would hear the prayers of His people, and of this God, it was a blasphemy to create an image. Many pagans were being converted, so many, in fact, that it was having an effect on the profits of the silversmiths who made shrines of the goddess!

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

As mentioned above, put up two signs that read “Agree” and “Disagree.” Ask the students to stand in a position between the two signs in response to some statements:

For example:

• “I would be willing to die for something I believed in.”
• “I think people are more important than ideas.”
• “I believe that God wants us to stand up for the truth.”

Ask the students why they chose the position they did. Is there anything that they are willing to stand for, no matter what the cost?

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- Other Eyes
  Ask them how the quotes in Other Eyes convey the point of the story in this lesson.

- Flashlight
  Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week’s story found in the book The Acts of the Apostles. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from Out of the Story.

- Punch Lines
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week’s story. Have them read the passages and ask each one to choose the verse that speaks most directly to them today. Then ask them to explain why they chose the one they did.
  Or you might assign the passages to pairs of students to read aloud and then discuss, in order to choose the most relevant one to them.
Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:
Having the courage to stand for your beliefs in the face of opposition is not easy. Paul faced an entire city filled with devoted pagans with a financial interest in their goddess’s temple. And we all know how seriously people take their money! God was with Paul, though, and protected him through it. In fact, God used a pagan official to calm down the crowd that wanted to kill him.

We can trust God to be with us and protect us when we stand up for what is right, even if we have to be the unpopular minority when we do so. God rewards us when we are loyal to Him, and He gives us the courage and wisdom to stand for what He thinks is important!

*www.keyway.ca/htm2000/20000512.htm;ww.turizm.net/cities/ephesus/artemision.html.*
“It was by cherishing a humble, teachable spirit that these men gained the experience that enabled them to go out as workers into the harvest field. Their example presents to Christians a lesson of great value. There are many who make but little progress in the divine life because they are too self-sufficient to occupy the position of learners. They are content with a superficial knowledge of God’s Word. They do not wish to change their faith or practice and hence make no effort to obtain greater light” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 283).
what do you think?

Do you know the saying, “You can’t make everyone happy all of the time”? In any group of people, at any time of day, there will always be someone who loves you, someone who hates you, someone who thinks you make ridiculous decisions, and someone who respects you from a distance. There are times, however, when the balance seems to be off!

Have you ever had an experience when you felt like everyone was against you? Have you ever been picked on? What do you think the reason was for this?

did you know?

According to research done at James Cook University in Australia, there are several different reasons for bullying:

- Desire for power
- Attempts at increasing self-concept
- Desire for self-aggrandizement
- Scapegoating
- Vindictiveness
- Overvaluing of compliance, control, and hierarchy
- Distrust of other people

While 80 percent of people claim to detest bullying, bullies believe that their behavior makes them admirable. (See www.jcu.edu.au/ease/staff equity/eoi/bullying/JCUDEV_010047.html for more descriptions of bully behavior.)

into the story

“About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: ‘You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.’

“When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’

“The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’

“The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: ‘Fellow Ephesians, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are procounsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.’ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.”

(Acts 19:23-41, NIV)
punch lines

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9, NIV).

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13, NIV).

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it” (Matthew 7:13, NIV).

“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all” (Isaiah 7:9, NIV).

“Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident” (Psalm 27:3, NIV).

“Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Mark 13:13, NIV).

“Conscience is the root of all true courage; if a man would be brave let him obey his conscience.”—James Freeman Clarke, 19th-century American preacher and author.

“Moral cowardice that keeps us from speaking our minds is as dangerous to this country as irresponsible talk.”—Margaret Chase Smith, 20th-century American politician.

“The test of courage comes when we are in the minority. The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority.”—Ralph W. Sockman, 20th-century American preacher.

OUT OF THE STORY

What was the reason for Demetrius’ behavior toward Paul?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Do you think that Paul was aware of why the city had been thrown into an uproar? Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Do you think that the city clerk was courageous in facing the mob? Why or why not?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

What do you think had a calming effect on the crowd?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

In the mob, it says that “most of the people did not even know why they were there.” What made them follow the group in this show of rage?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

What can we learn from this story about peer pressure?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
Sabbath
Have you ever felt as if everyone was against you? Perhaps you were being picked on for not fitting in, or maybe you did something that was considered unpopular. Regardless of the reason why, being the unpopular minority is never a comfortable experience. As a Christian, you might find yourself in this situation in order to stand up for what you believe in. Psalm 27:3 says: “Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident” (NIV).

Are you willing to take a stand for what is right, even if you are the only one to do it? How can you do so fearlessly and confidently?

Sunday
In our story this week, we see one man’s ambition for wealth and position fueling a mob against Paul. Paul had not hurt anyone. In fact, he was preaching love and decent living! He might not have even known that the riot was caused by one man who resented the decrease in his sales of idols. This was a terrifying situation. Sometimes when it feels like the entire world is against us, it isn’t because of anything we have done wrong. Sometimes it is about something else entirely. How can you trust God enough to continue doing the right thing, even when everything seems to go crazy around you?

Monday
Acts 19:11, 12 tells us about the miracles that God worked for people through Paul. God was able to work through Paul because Paul was both humble and determined to do the right thing no matter what the cost. People were healed and made happier because of God’s use of Paul. What do you think God could do through you for your friends and acquaintances if you let Him? How could other people be made happier because they knew you? How might they realize that there is a God because of your life?

Tuesday
Ellen White emphasizes the need for Christians to be humble. Christians need to take God seriously, not themselves! If we take ourselves too seriously, we end up like the bully who was so concerned about his sales. In order for God to do something with us, He has to be able to teach us; and to be able to teach us, we have to be flexible. There is always something more to learn, something deeper to realize. Try to consciously keep an open mind today and ask God to teach you something new.

Wednesday
It isn’t easy sometimes doing the right thing. It seems that the right path tends to be the harder one a lot of the time! (Mark 13:13). But God never asks us to do it alone. God is with us, protecting us and supporting us every step of the way. It takes courage to face adversity in order to do what God asks us to do. It takes courage to be different from the rest of the crowd. It is that God-given courage that sets us apart and makes it obvious that we have been with Jesus. Have you been waffling about something you believe in? Ask God for the courage to stand firm, and watch how He blesses you for your commitment!

Thursday
It’s much easier to be in the majority, blending in and enjoying the approval of your peers than it is to be the unpopular minority. In any group, there are always the few who are picked on and aren’t accepted. It isn’t easy to stand up against the majority, but if no one does, nothing will ever change! Are there any people in your social sphere who are left out or picked on? Do you have the courage to stand up for them and do the right thing, even though you would have to oppose the popular majority? How big of a difference could you make in one person’s life for taking a stand?

Friday
God expects us to stand firm on the important issues. In your relationship with God, what issues has God shown you to be most important? What issues or positions matter most to you? What is worth standing for? And how can you stand firm in a way that shows people the kind, gracious, awesome God we serve?