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 in gear for the story to follow. Every time you approach a Bible story, you are coming to it in the context of the story in which you live every day.
• Did You Know?—a brief statistic or definition that digs a little deeper into the story or simply provides some helpful facts to bring to the lesson.
• Key Text—a verse that points out a key concept from the story. It is also a great place to find verses that you can memorize and store away for later use.
• Punch Lines—a few other verses from Scripture that punctuate key concepts of the lesson. You may see connections between them and the Bible story as well as your own life.
• Flashlight—a brief snapshot of Ellen White's input on the story. These glimmers that shed light onto the biblical passage will also give you a glimpse of what awaits you in the suggested weekly reading from her inspired commentary on the stories—The Conflict of the Ages.
• **Other Eyes**—a couple of quotes from various contemporary or historic sources that may open up a slightly different perspective on the central message of the lesson.

• **Making It Real**—the guide to making the truths about God in this story your 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.

*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.*
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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April

5—Love Is Patient [p. 11]
We all desire to love and to be loved. But how do we remain sexually pure in a world that doesn’t see love the way God sees it?

12—More Than a Job [p. 19]
When we choose a career, there’s more to consider than merely money. How can we also contribute to God’s cause through it?

19—God’s Eye for the Gay Guy [p. 27]
How can we as Christians love homosexuals and yet not compromise with the sin of a homosexual lifestyle?

26—That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It [p. 35]
When the authorities came to arrest Paul, he asked permission to tell the crowd the story of his conversion experience. Our stories also have powerful potential to change lives.

May

3—Faithful in the Kangaroo Court [p. 43]
We will all be called by Christ to endure trials for Him with character and integrity. What better way to prepare for that future than by today living a life devoted to Him.

10—Wearing Someone Else’s Clothes [p. 51]
To be compassionate is to have a keen sympathy for the suffering of others. What does being “clothed with compassion” look like?

17—A Good Report [p. 59]
Though none of us want to face difficulties and trials, we can view these times as opportunities for lifting up the name of Jesus in our words and deeds.

24—A Part, Not Apart [p. 67]
God provided comfort and companionship to Paul through the loving-kindness of other believers while he was imprisoned. The church today is also meant for that type of unselfish love.

31—Alone but Not Defenseless [p. 75]
Paul stood trial before Nero without an advocate. No one was willing to speak on his behalf. We may also need to stand alone for Christ, but we will never be without an advocate.

June

7—Love Power [p. 83]
Time spent with Jesus is never wasted time. Lingering in Christ’s presence gives the power to transform our lives.

14—Stuck on an Island [p. 91]
The apostle John was keenly aware that his belief in Christ put him at odds with religious and civil leaders. As is often the case, however, that which humanity intends for evil God uses for His glory.

21—Forever Faithful [p. 99]
God has always had a remnant people—those who refuse to compromise with the majority. Are you part of this group?

28—Go Out Like a Light [p. 107]
Many people encourage us to give our lives for “a cause.” But have we chosen a cause that will endure throughout eternity?
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Sexual purity is a tough topic to tackle in this day and age. In order for anyone to summon up the strength to wait for marriage, they have to believe in the importance of sexual purity in their own lives. Why would God ask us to deny ourselves physical pleasure until marriage? Why did Paul take such a strong stance against sexual impurity? What is the big deal, anyway?

The desire to be sexually active before marriage isn’t only about a physical experience; it’s about a desire for intimacy. The Key Text (2 Corinthians 13:12) talks about knowing and being fully known—the best description of intimacy this writer has ever seen. The desire for intimacy is very human and it is not sinful in the least. God created us to enjoy a sexual relationship within marriage.

Yet we all share a desire to love and be loved. The world’s definition of love is that of a feeling. The world says that we feel loving, and when that feeling passes, we should abandon the relationship in search of another feeling. However, the Bible defines love differently in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is an action. When we follow God’s leading and act in a loving way, those loving feelings come as a result. Part of real love is waiting for the physical demonstration of love until marriage. Love is patient.

So what do the students ultimately want in their lives? And how does the Bible tell us to go about getting it? How is it different from the world’s view? We will discuss these topics in our lesson this week.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Understand why God asks us to wait until marriage before having sex. (Know)
• Sense the good things that God has waiting for us as a result of our patience. (Feel)
• Choose to make a personal decision about sexual purity in their own lives. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Sex
• Godly Love
• Media

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 rate on a scale between 1 and 10 their position on premarital sex for the following situations. (1-OK, 10-wrong.)

1. A couple have been dating for a year and are about to be separated at different colleges.
2. A couple have just met but are very attracted to each other and want to pursue a romantic relationship together.
3. A couple are thinking about getting married and want to make sure that they are compatible sexually before making the commitment.

4. Why do the students feel the way they do? What are their reasons?

Illustration
Share this illustration in your own words:

Queen Elizabeth I was 25 years old when she became queen of England and Ireland. Her mother, Anne Boleyn, was executed when Elizabeth was only 3, and Elizabeth was declared illegitimate. Her brother, Edward VI, cut her out of succession in his will, but when her sister, the Catholic Mary, died, after Elizabeth had been imprisoned for almost a year under suspicion of aiding the Protestant cause, his will was set aside and Elizabeth became queen.

England was a political boiling cauldron. The Catholics and Protestants were at each other’s throats. Not only did Elizabeth have a very unstable England to deal with, but she also had to find a husband. Society said that women were inferior to men. They were weaker. They were less intelligent. They were unable to grapple with the immense responsibilities of state. Therefore, a husband was necessary for Elizabeth . . . a husband who would become king and rule for her while she put herself to the chore of providing herself an heir.

The lineup of suitors was lengthy, and everyone waited with bated breath to see whom the queen would choose to marry. Elizabeth was a sitting duck, and Europe was waiting to pounce on her.

Until Elizabeth did the unthinkable—she declared herself the Virgin Queen! She would never marry. She would remain single and devote herself to her country. Because of her decision, Elizabeth would be seen as a saint, right beneath the Virgin Mary, and she would reign for 44 years, giving England much-needed security and stability.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

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

Elizabeth stood in the face of a society that said she had no value without a husband and declared that she did! This strength of character was what made Elizabeth the stuff of stories and legends ever since. While God does not expect us to remain unmarried, He does expect us to stand up for what is right. While sexual purity does not have value to much of the world, it has immense value to God because His way gives us a happier life.

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.

• How seriously did Paul think sexual purity was?
• List the definitions of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. The first descriptor of love is that it is patient. What does this mean to you?
• By looking at these two passages, how are typical Hollywood relationships different than God’s ideal for us?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: John 4:1-42; 8:1-11; Galatians 5:16-26; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

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 Greek city of Corinth is about 49 miles west of Athens. It was a city known for both its wealth and immorality. Corinth had a temple dedicated to Venus that employed more than 1,000 priestess prostitutes. The people of Corinth had seen it all, and were not easily shocked.

It is important to remember that the Corinthian church was a relatively new congregation, and Paul was doing his best to watch over them and keep them going in the right direction. He was more than a little upset when he started hearing stories of sexual impurity within the congregation. One young man was even sleeping with his stepmother! This was not acceptable, and Paul knew that the rest of the people were turning a blind eye, sweeping it under the rug, and generally treating this horrible thing as “not their business.” Paul, however, had something to say on the matter. It was their business! God had a much higher expectation from people who believed and knew better than He did from pagans who did not know Him yet. And He expected them to keep each other accountable.

Paul told them to stop associating with anyone claiming to be a believer who would flagrantly live a lifestyle outside of God’s direction. Basically, they were
**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

_Fostering Independent Thinking_

Independent thinkers do not simply accept what the teacher is saying; they question and grapple with the information, seeing if it makes sense to them. This is an important step before the student can make use of what he or she has learned. A tip for fostering independent thinking in your class is to ask broader, higher questions, not simple recapping or directing recall questions. Nor will simple “yes” or “no” answers accomplish this goal. This type of questioning helps the students think about the information independently and draw their own conclusions. Thus, their spiritual experience becomes their own.

told to stop talking with the offenders, to stop being chummy with them. Paul knew that “birds of a feather flock together,” and that if that young man was left to do as he pleased without any censure, he would end up losing his salvation. It was better to give him a little tough love than to lose him for all eternity.

Paul (in 1 Corinthians 13) describes what true love is. Venus, the Greek goddess of love, focused on sexual satisfaction, while Paul showed that real love is something much different. Paul showed how love is not a sexual act or even a fleeting feeling, but an approach to individuals and to life. Love was not a sordid affair or a guilty act; it was a pattern of behavior. Love is patient, kind, selfless, and pure. And, as we see in the first passage, love does not turn a blind eye to something that is wrong. Love points it out so that the person can benefit. Only God’s love through us can show us how to do that effectively!

**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

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

Ask students to think of the negative repercussions that can result from premarital sex. Ideas might be sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, emotional crisis, inability to pursue further education because of a baby, marrying someone who might not make a good partner, or lowered self-esteem following the dissolution of a relationship after having had sex already. Ask the students to look at their responses to the situational questions from the beginning of class and ask them if they think that they would stand by their original answers, or adjust them. Why or why not?

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

God asks us to keep ourselves pure, but this is not simply an exercise in self-control or denial. God wants us to have the intimacy that we all crave, but He also wants it to last.

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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.
Love in our modern society is often defined as sexual or emotional. Emotions are unpredictable, and sex without commitment is often an empty and guilty experience. Love as defined in the Bible is an action. Love is shown by how we react in difficult situations, or how we patiently wait.

Within marriage sex is a beautiful communication of love. But outside of marriage we are set up for disappointment, embarrassment, and heartbreak. If we follow God’s plan and wait for the right time to enjoy this special intimacy, we can experience all the good things God has waiting for us. True, lasting love chooses to wait until the time is right.

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 29, 30, 31, 32.
love is patient

Scripture Story: 1 Corinthians; 2 Corinthians.
Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 29, 30, 31, 32.

flashlight

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

key text

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

(1 Corinthians 13:12, NIV)
**What statement best describes your position on premarital sex?**

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

**According to a survey done in 2002, by age 20, 75 percent of the American respondents had had premarital sex. In another survey done in 2009, 71 percent of American young adults 18-29 thought that premarital sex was OK. When questioning respondents under 30, they discovered that in the single, sexually active population, 55 percent thought that their sex life was very satisfying. In the married or committed population under 30, 77 percent of the respondents felt that their sex life was very satisfying.**

**“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.**

**“What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked person from among you.’”**

**“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.”**

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in parts disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

(1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 13, NIV)
How do you think we should balance being supportive and loving with standing for our principles?

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

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

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

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

By looking at these passages, how would you define love?

“Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (Genesis 24:67, NIV).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Sunday**

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

**Monday**

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

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

**Tuesday**

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

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

**Wednesday**

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

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

**Thursday**

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

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

**Friday**

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

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**this week’s reading**

*The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 29, 30, 31, 32.

*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 www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.UjRf1i60Os. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
I. SYNOPSIS

Everyone is faced with a career choice eventually. Even choosing not to go to school or not to plan for a career is a choice—a choice to take whatever comes. God created each one of us to be exactly who we are. He gave us talents, personality, and dreams. He wove us together with all of our nerves and sinews for a particular purpose. We each have something unique and important to contribute. Our careers are a part of that contribution, and choosing them is no small thing!

In 2 Thessalonians 3:8-12 Paul tells us how important it for us to work for a living and to stay productive. Even Paul, who was the greatest apostle working to further God’s kingdom, worked as a tentmaker to support himself. A good work ethic is an important thing. Not only does it develop our characters, but it also serves as a witness.

However, there is another human tendency to work hard in order to make a lot of money. When money is our highest priority, we step onto some very dangerous ground. While money is a necessity in this world, we must not rely on money as if it could save us. Money is a tool, but when we make it our focus, we risk “all kinds of evil.”

When we choose a career, there is more to consider than money and hard work. We are told to be not only consumers but contributors to God’s cause. We must pray and ask God to lead us in the direction in which He wants us to go.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand that God has a work for them to do. (Know)
- Sense the importance of their contribution to God’s cause. (Feel)
- Choose to seek God and ask for His guidance in their life choices. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Workers for Christ
- Career choices
- Stewardship*

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.

- What career can you see yourself excelling at in the future?
- What reasons do you think you would be good at this job? What reservations do you have?
- Do you think that God has a career that He wants you to do, or do you think that career choices are up to us?
- What factors do you take into account when
considering your career options?
• How important is salary to you? How important is others’ opinion of your choice?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Albert Einstein is known as a scientific genius. He discovered the theory of relativity, suggesting that space and time were connected and that the universe was shaped like a saddle. He was brilliant, and even today very few of us are even sure what he was talking about! His ideas go whizzing past our heads, and all we can do is shrug and say, “Genius!”

Albert Einstein was not always seen as a genius, however. He was born in Germany in 1879. His parents made sure that young Albert was properly educated. By 1901, when he received his diploma in Zurich, he was ready to start his career as a mathematics teacher. The only problem? He couldn’t get anyone to hire him! That year he acquired his Swiss citizenship and since he couldn’t find another job, he took a position as a technical assistant in the Swiss patent office.

At this point, Einstein was unknown, but during his free time at the patent office he produced much of his most remarkable work. In fact, he scrawled out three essays and submitted them to the journal Annalen der Physik to be published if there were space. All three essays were published in the same issue of the journal, and Albert Einstein was recognized for the genius that he was!

Einstein went on to teach at the most prestigious universities of the world, and to receive numerous scientific awards for groundbreaking work in relativity.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Einstein was created with an extraordinary brain. God gave him the ability to understand things that most of the world can’t wrap their minds around. The first step in his career, however, was what seemed like a boring plan B. A job in the patent office would have been a drudgery for a genius like Einstein, but it gave him the free time that he needed to think through the ideas that were spinning through his mind. God had something specific for Einstein to accomplish. What things in your life can you see that might be God’s hand, guiding you in a particular direction?

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 characteristics make up a good work ethic according to these passages?
• What lessons do we see about handling money?
• How do these passages relate to choosing one’s career?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Genesis 39–47; Matthew 25:14-30; 18:12-14.

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 first passage (2 Thessalonians 3:8-12), according to the Matthew Henry Bible Commentary, some of the people of the church in Thessalonica misunderstood Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians in which he told them that the coming of Jesus was very soon. They thought that since Jesus’ return was so imminent they should not work at their trades, but instead simply wait. This was not what Paul had intended at all. Not only did it put undue stress upon the other members to support them, but they were not piously waiting. They were gossiping and generally making trouble. Paul stressed that those who did not work should not eat. They were not to stop living their regular lives, but to keep on working, making money and eating, while at the same time furthering the church’s work. A righteous life is not the life of a recluse, but the life of a productive person who lives as God asks us to.

Timothy, who was first converted by Paul, was an evangelist. He was “lower” than an apostle, and he worked in church planting. Paul was writing to Timothy to encourage him in his ministry. The second passage (1 Timothy 6:10-19) is a charge to Timothy. Paul, as Timothy’s mentor, is warning him about the danger of loving money. Timothy was young, and like the rest of us, would have been tempted to do something more lucrative. The work that Timothy did for the church did not pay, and he would have been, in essence, volunteering his time.

Timothy was also being given the responsibility of
**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Discussion Potpourri**

Class discussion of a topic can help solidify the ideas in the students' minds. When facilitating a discussion, it is important to ask a question that is not too broad as to be confusing, nor too narrow as to be too obvious. Students will not answer questions that are either of these extremes. Do not ask anything that can be answered with a simple yes or no. If the question is one that could be relevant to the students’ lives, they will be more apt to make comments. Try not to call on one student over and over again, and rephrase their comment back to them to make sure that they are being understood.

addressing the very wealthy. In Greek or even Judean society, a young man did not have the ability to approach his elders or those of a higher social status. However, in the Christian community, these social niceties were being stood on their heads. Timothy, both young and not wealthy, was being given the authority to teach those much higher than he was on their responsibilities. The wealthy were to care for the poor and not trust too much in their money. Rich or poor, everyone is equal in God's eyes.

Paul was establishing the church in these sec-

**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

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

Ask the students to write down five ways that they can prepare for their future careers. Examples might be achieving a certain grade level to let them get into university, volunteering in school council, or finding a part-time job or volunteer position in the field that interests them. Look at each idea and ask how God can be included in these plans for their futures. How can God stay at the center of their career goals?

**Summary**

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Choosing a career is an important decision. Like all decisions in our lives, God must be a part of it. He created us with a job to do, and our career aspirations are a part of that. God gave us talents and desires for a reason, and if we follow the talents that God gave us, we will find a rewarding career waiting for us. We are not put on this earth to consume and show off; we are

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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.
here to be productive, help others, and show the world what living for God is all about. While a strong work ethic is very important, it is equally important that we don’t get sucked into the trap of striving for money, money, money. We can’t forget that God knows our needs before we do, and He’ll provide for us. The most important thing we can do is to follow God’s will for our lives.

* Fundamental Belief No. 21.

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 33, 34.
more than a job

flashlight

“The indolent forfeit the invaluable experience gained by a faithful performance of the common duties of life. Not a few, but thousands of human beings exist only to consume the benefits which God in His mercy bestows upon them. . . . They forget that by trading wisely on the talents lent them they are to be producers as well as consumers. If they comprehended the work that the Lord desires them to do as His helping hand they would not shun responsibility” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 353).

keytext

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

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

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

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

[INTO THE STORY]

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

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

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

“But you,

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

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

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

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

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

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

What should our priorities be for our futures?

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

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

“He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Colossians 1:28, 29, NIV).

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

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

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

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

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

“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”—Michael Jordan, American NBA basketball player.
Sabbath
In Colossians 1:28, 29 Paul describes what he is working for. Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and he worked hard at his job so that he could financially support himself and never be a burden on the church members. Regardless of his career that he was trained for, his passion was to tell others about Jesus. Paul took great pride in his hard work, but he used his career to further the gospel. Who would have thought that tent-making could be used for God? How could your career path be used for God?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


this week’s reading*
The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 33, 34.

*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 www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URHf18BO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
Today’s young people are growing up in a world more tolerant of alternative lifestyles. The media portrays homosexuality as an acceptable—even desirable—option, portraying it regularly in TV shows and movies. This lesson offers an opportunity to tackle a sensitive subject that is on the minds of many young people. Since the culture is not shy about perpetuating a certain view on the topic, it is especially important that our young people hear an alternative view based on God’s Word. Fortunately, the Bible is not silent on the subject. So dive into the discussion with Bibles open and hearts receptive to what God would want you to know and do. If this is the direction you choose to take the lesson, then it is important to emphasize how Christians and the church can love the individual homosexual and yet not compromise with the sin of a homosexual lifestyle.

Perhaps you feel it wise in your context to steer the lesson in another direction. Since the scope of this study embodies both the books of Romans and Galatians, you have wide boundaries to explore and yet remain within the text of this teaching. Both Romans and Galatians contain very insightful teaching on the topic of salvation. Many young people today are starving for solid, biblical teaching about the assurance and experience of salvation. These books of the Bible give you that opportunity to share the good news of salvation.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Hear about the freedom that results from a life of obedience to God. (Know)
• Sense God’s passion to save every person. (Feel)
• Be challenged to experience the assurance that comes by following God. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
• Homosexuality
• Salvation (assurance of)
• Salvation (experience of)
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 exercise:
• Quiz your young people about gay characters they have seen in movies and on TV. Keep a master list of these shows and then discuss the following questions:
• How are these characters portrayed in the movies or on TV?
• How do the media stereotypes measure up to
any gays that you know personally?
• How does the treatment of homosexuals in movies and TV compare to the way they are treated in real life?
• Do you think it is politically incorrect to call homosexuality a sin? Why or why not?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Illustration
Marion struggled with her sexual orientation. Listen to some pieces of her story:

My first year of college was very lonely. I never bonded with any guys, even though I felt some attraction to men. I had no one with whom to share. I felt very alone and isolated. . .

Eventually I became involved with another woman who was a lesbian. . . . My lesbian friend and I lived together for eight years. . .

One Sunday around Easter while I was out jogging, I passed a church and felt an urge to go in and pray. I hadn't been in a church for years, but I enjoyed the worship and felt a peace there. . .

I was drawing away from my partner and closer to God. I wanted Him to take charge of my life. He did not condemn me but showed me His unconditional love. He cared for me regardless of what I had done or what choices I made. I also had a strong sense from God that I shouldn't continue to live this way. Without a shadow of a doubt, I knew I had to leave homosexuality. . .

After being actively lesbian for nine years, I left that life behind almost 10 years ago. Through a long process of change and growth, I am no longer sexually attracted to women. Attending a support group was particularly helpful for dealing with that sexual attraction and for working through the feelings of hurt from my past.1

Bridge to the Story
Romans 1:26, 27 describes the sinful culture of the day in this way: “Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved” (NLT).

• How does this passage inform the argument so prevalent today that homosexuality is simply an alternative lifestyle—not necessarily a sinful lifestyle?
• Note that they suffered “as a result of this sin.” Even in a world that is, generally speaking, very tolerant and accepting of gay people, how might they suffer today?

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.

Read Romans 1:28-32. After describing the perversion of homosexuality, Paul goes on to portray the depraved mind that is “filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity” (NIV). Note the specific sins that Paul includes in his list. Are there any sins in the list that surprise you? Why? Are all the sins in his list equally evil? In the eyes of God are murderers as offensive to a holy God as gossips? Why or why not? How would you explain Paul's observation in verse 32 that even though they know that the consequence of their sin is death, they continue in their unrighteous behavior?

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

This lesson covers two letters that the apostle Paul wrote around A.D. 50. Getting a broader view of the letters can be helpful in understanding the overall message that Paul was trying to convey. Whatever teaching from the book(s) you wish to emphasize, it should always be presented within the framework of the bigger picture. Use the following thumbnail overviews to ensure that your teaching is consistent with the historical and cultural context.

Romans
Overview: Like a skilled attorney, Paul presents a carefully organized statement of his faith in this letter to the believers in Rome. While Paul knew about the church in Rome, he had never been there. The church had been formed by Jews who had come to faith during Pentecost (Acts 2). They shared their faith in Rome
and the church grew. Although it does not have the form of a typical letter, Paul does spend considerable time greeting people in Rome at the end of it. The purpose of the letter was to introduce himself to the Romans and to share his message of righteousness by faith and the gospel before his journey to Rome.

**Major Themes**
- Sin
- Salvation
- Growth
- Sovereignty
- Service

**The Blueprint**

*Chapters 1-11*: Paul shares what to believe. He presents an airtight argument for the lostness of humankind and the necessity for God’s intervention. He goes on to share the good news that we can experience salvation through the forgiveness of Christ’s sacrifice at Calvary and we can live above the clutches of sin’s grasp.

*Chapters 12-16*: Paul shares how to behave. The Christian journey is not an abstract theology disconnected from real life. It has practical implications that impact choices and behavior each day. It is not acceptable to merely know the gospel; we must live it.

**Galatians**

**Overview**: The book of Galatians was written to the churches in southern Galatia. It is the charter of Christian freedom. In his letter Paul declares the reality of our liberty in Jesus—freedom from the law and the power of sin. Paul refutes the teachers who were making the claim that in order for Gentiles to be saved they must obey the Jewish laws. Moreover, it is an appeal to Christians to live out their faith and find total freedom in Christ.

**Major Themes**
- Law
- Faith
- Freedom
- Holy Spirit

**The Blueprint**

*Chapters 1-2*: Paul speaks to the authenticity of the gospel.

*Chapters 3-4*: Paul outlines the superiority of the gospel.

*Chapters 5-6*: Paul proclaims the freedom of the gospel.

**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

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

You may want to invite a panel of parents to attend the session and talk about their views on homosexuality. Of course, choosing the right parents will be the key to success. It’s important that they are respectful of all people—regardless of their orientation. They must also respect the differing opinions of the youth. Encourage your group members to ask questions and engage in honest conversation on the topic.

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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 Sensitive Topics*

Should you decide to focus this study on the topic of homosexuality, it may be helpful to peruse the following suggestions adapted from U. C. Berkeley’s Office of Educational Development:

1. Create a classroom environment that sets ground rules for discussion and makes it clear that all students are included in the work of the class.
2. Recognize the diversity of opinions and backgrounds of your students.
3. Be prepared. Even if you do not think there will be a reaction to an issue you raise, plan ahead what you will do if you encounter one. Know yourself and your own emotional triggers. Don’t personalize remarks.
4. Focus the discussion on the topic, not the individual student.
5. Protect all students equally during moments of potential conflict. Seek to draw out understanding and communication as well as opinions.
6. Foster an environment of debate and dialogue in which it is OK to disagree.
7. If a student suffers from an emotional reaction or angry outburst because of a sensitive topic discussion, acknowledge it, and ask them if they would like to remain or leave for a while.³

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**Summary**

Share the following study and discuss it with your students.

Robert L. Spitzer, the Columbia University psychiatry professor who convinced the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973, sparked another controversy again by saying that homosexuals can change their orientation—if they want to. “The subjects’ self-reports of change appear to be, by and large, valid, rather than gross exaggerations, brainwashing or wishful thinking,” he summarizes. Spitzer interviewed 153 men and 47 women who said counseling had helped to change their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. ABC News sums up the data: “66 percent of the men and 44 percent of women reached what he called good heterosexual functioning—a sustained, loving heterosexual relationship...”⁴

*Questions for discussion:*

Do the findings of Dr. Spitzer surprise you? Why or why not?

What suggestions would you share with a friend who is interested in leaving a gay lifestyle?

Check out the Web site www.narth.com. How might this resource assist in helping to change a gay lifestyle?

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³ Fundamental Belief No. 10.
⁴ As quoted at www.freetobeme.com/rs_marion.htm.
⁵ Adapted from ctfd.sfsu.edu/feature/top-ten-tips-for-addressing-sensitive-topics-and-maintaining-civility-in-the-classroom.htm.

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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), chapters 35, 36.
God’s eye for the gay guy

flashlight

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

keytext

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

(Galatians 5:1, NIV)

Scripture Story: Romans; Galatians
What do you think—Y (yes), N (no), or M (maybe)?

- Homosexuality is a choice.
- Salvation is possible for practicing homosexuals.
- Homosexuality isn’t a big deal to God.
- Homosexuals cannot change their orientation.
- The church should be more open and reach out to people in the homosexual community.
- Homosexuals and heterosexuals are the same in God’s eye.
- Heterosexual sex outside of marriage is just as much a sin as homosexual sex.
- Homosexuals should have the same assurance of salvation as the pastor in my church.
- For people who struggle with sexual sin, the assurance of salvation is different than the experience of salvation.
- There’s a difference between being a homosexual and practicing it.

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

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

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

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

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

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery . . . . You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

(Romans 1:24-32, NLT; Romans 5:1, 2, 9-11, NIV; Galatians 5:1, 13-15, NIV)
“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. 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; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, NIV).

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

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

“Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable” (Leviticus 18:22, NIV).

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

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

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

Sunday
Reflect on the verse: “Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done” (Romans 1:28, NLT).

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

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

Monday
Read the Key Text then write a modern paraphrase of it.

Tuesday
Review the Flashlight section and reflect on these questions:
- Have you experienced the “first love of gospel truth”? If so, what was it like?
- What were the arguments that Paul used to challenge people to become free men and women in Christ?
- Are we to understand from Ellen White’s statement that it is impossible to be saved without “a genuine, personal experience in the things of God”? Why or why not? What can we do to nurture that kind of experience with God?

Wednesday
Read the verses in Punch Lines. Now compare the Bible teaching to our culture’s ambivalent attitude toward homosexuality. It seems like every prime-time TV show showcases a gay person. On the screen, the homosexual lifestyle sizzles with mystery and pizzazz. But what’s Hollywood hiding? As it turns out, there are many downsides to an active gay lifestyle. Consider these issues that gay people often report:

- Shame and guilt
- Discrimination
- Loneliness
- Being bullied
- Fragile self-esteem

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

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

Thursday
Read the following texts and then summarize what the Bible teaches about homosexuality.
- Romans 1:26, 27
- Leviticus 18:22
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11
- 1 Timothy 1:10, 11
- 1 Corinthians 10:13

Friday
What would happen in your church if a Christian homosexual were to openly and publicly share about their “orientation”? Would you agree with your church’s handling of the issue? Why or why not?

Suppose a gay friend asked you how they can have the assurance and the experience of salvation. What would you say to your friend?

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

This week’s reading*


that’s my story and I’m sticking to it

Scripture Story: Acts 20:4–23:35,

I. SYNOPSIS
Paul’s final days were ahead of him and even though the religious leaders at Jerusalem were looking to arrest him, he longed to share with the believers what God was doing on behalf of the gospel. He also wanted to present to them the generous offering from the Gentile believers all over the world. This week’s lesson is about Paul’s last visit to Jerusalem, where he voluntarily turned himself in. This act had been prophesied by the prophet Agabus when “he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, ‘This is what the Holy Spirit says: “In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”’” (Acts 21:11, NASB). Upon his arrival the news spread, and the authorities came to arrest him. It is at that time that Paul asked for permission to speak to the crowd and when he did, he simply told the story of his conversion experience.

The lesson for young people today is modeled by Paul as he tells his conversion story. One of the great failings of the religious leaders of that day, and perhaps the same is true today, was that they could not imagine their religion changing. Ellen White observed that “these men had lost sight of the fact that God is the teacher of His people; that every worker in His cause is to obtain an individual experience in following the divine Leader” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 401). This week we need to challenge young people to obtain this personal encounter with God so their story might indeed affect the world as did Paul’s.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Deepen their understanding of the importance of personal experience. (Know)
• Sense a responsibility to testify. (Feel)
• Determine to encounter God with genuine devotion and live to tell about it. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
• Adversity/trials
• Character
• Conflict
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 appropriate options. You may have students pencil in an example or illustration of each type of transformation story. You might invite the students to share what their first choice was or name each sample given and ask, “How many of you chose this as your first choice?” Always invite the students to
explain their response and affirm their answers in order to foster more discussion. The ultimate goal is to get students to talk about what kind of life change matters to them.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The story is told of John Currier, who was sentenced to life in prison for committing the crime of murder back in 1949. After several years they transferred him out and put him on parole where he was assigned to work on a farm in Tennessee. Almost 20 years later, John Currier’s life sentence had been terminated and he was legally a free man. Except, John never received the letter and no one chose to tell him about his freedom. He continued to labor under the rugged work without even the hope of ever being a free man. Currier continued to work day in and day out on that farm even after the farmer he worked for had passed away.

Another 10 years passed before a state parole officer discovered what had happened and immediately set out to find John Currier and tell him he was free. He found John and shared with him that he had been a free man and apologized that the news had never reached him.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

How would you have felt? What if someone neglected or purposely avoided telling you the truth about your freedom and kept you in bondage all your life? Maybe Paul felt so compelled to share the message of Christ to others that there was no way he was going to hold back the kind of knowledge that just might set someone free.

John Currier represents people who might come to know the joy of salvation if someone would just declare it in a way that they can understand. Paul had one moment to open his mouth and speak words that might help some understand and accept Christ. What would he say to the hostile crowd? How could his words penetrate the stiff-necked Jews in Jerusalem that stood in the way of the Christian movement?

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 verses leading up to this story in which Paul reveals what happened to him. What do you think is the most compelling part of Paul’s testimony? Why?
• Underline the words or phrases that you think are critical to understanding its message.
• Circle the names of people mentioned in this story and see if you can identify them.
• Why do you think the angry crowd fell silent when Paul spoke to them in Hebrew?
• Given one opportunity to speak, Paul chose to tell his conversion story rather than try to defend the prejudices people had about him. Why?
• Ananias is described as “a devout man according to the law.” Gamaliel and Ananias were two different but devoted Jews. Coupling those names with Paul’s own reputation, what do you think the listeners were feeling as they heard his story?
• Who are some other people in Scripture who told their own story of what God had done for them? How did people respond to them?
• To what degree do you think Paul’s testimony had an impact on people?
• What do you think is the ultimate message in this story?

Extra Questions for Teachers:

• What impact do you think Paul’s Saul-to-Paul story had on the crowd? Think about how crowds react together and how when you are alone you tend to think differently than you do in the masses. While Paul was arrested, to what degree do you think Paul planted seeds in the hearts of Jerusalem for the gospel?
• Who would you liken the hostile crowd of the Jews to in your world? Do any of your friends, neighbors, or people at your school hold prejudices toward the message of Christ?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Acts 9; Acts 1; John 4; Revelation 12:14; 1 John 1:1-4.

Sharing Context and Background

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

This week’s lesson picks up at a climax of events
that build with ferocious momentum over the course of two and a half chapters. Paul is determined to take the offering to Jerusalem and tell the “headquarters” about the good news of the work. In Acts 20:7-12 there is the all-night prayer meeting and fellowship experience in which the boy falls out of the window and is brought back to life, followed by a sad farewell (20:17-38). In chapter 21 the thrust of Paul’s desire to get to Jerusalem picks up speed, but warnings come from the prophet Agabus in dramatic prophetic fashion (Acts 21:7-14). Barclay notes that “when words were inadequate, they dramatized their message” (The Daily Study Bible, p. 154). (Examples of this can be found in Isaiah 20:3, 4; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Ezekiel 4; 1 Kings 11:29-31.) In spite of all the danger and woe from the surrounding churches, Paul makes his way to certain death at Jerusalem.

Why did the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem want Paul dead? Paul’s insistence that Gentiles be welcomed into the fellowship shook the foundations of Jewish Christians. It was hard enough to imagine that they crucified the Messiah, but to undermine their heritage was too much for many to bear.

Why did they arrest Paul?

For Paul, the lines between Jew and Greek (Gentile) were blurred, and the only distinction he made between people had to do with whether they believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, or not. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NKJV) Paul says: “We were all baptized into one body,” and to the church at Galatia Paul admonished: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, NKJV). When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the Asian Jews claimed they had witnessed Paul taking Trophimus (an uncircumcised Gentile) into the Temple where no Gentile had been allowed to enter on pain of death. The people came and practically killed Paul by beating him until the authorities arrived and secured him. The peo-
people who were looking to arrest Paul found a reason, and that reason pivots on the primary problem of the church in the New Testament: how do Gentiles who come to believe in Christ fit in and relate to the church?

Paul’s contrived arrest is almost as dubious as Christ’s several years previous. Keep in mind that while Paul worked tirelessly for the Gentiles his heart had been with the Jewish people, and he simply longed for them to understand. In his mind, his own peril was not as important as the Jews fully surrendering their prejudices for the kingdom of Christ.

III. CLOSING

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

Divide the class into three groups and have each group read one of the three accounts of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9; 22; 26). Ask: “What are the main features of the story—the most important details?” Gather the groups together and draw on a large piece of paper or a chalkboard three large overlapping circles. Leave a large portion where the circles overlap (this is where the groups will share common features of the story) and leave some room in each circle for unique parts of the story. Ask: “What are the events that are similar and what details are different?” Each story is told to an entirely different audience and while the basic story is the same, some elements are added or subtracted, probably for a reason. Invite the students to imagine what that reason is. You might even ask them to choose one of the stories they appreciate the most and why. Conclude by inviting them to begin thinking of their own story and what that would look like when delivered to different groups of people.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Even though Paul knew that the Jews were just waiting to pounce on him, he made his way to Jerusalem because he believed the cause of Christ was bigger than his own safety. The Jews who had come to Jerusalem to attend the feasts saw their heritage slipping away as many Gentiles became believers in Christ. The new era of Christianity ushered in and signaled the end of the old era of the Jews. Paul’s arrest was primarily about this kind of prejudice, a quality that has no place in the church. But Paul knew that his story would sear in their memory more than any argument he could construct, so he elected to quiet the crowd and speak directly about the experience of transforming from Saul to Paul. If you are called upon to speak, what experience would you relate? What story of God’s direction and grace would you deliver? Do you know Christ in such a way that you too, like Paul, have a story to tell?

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 37, 38.
“Had he attempted to enter into argument with his opponents, they would have stubbornly refused to listen to his words; but the relation of his experience was attended with a convincing power that for the time seemed to soften and subdue their hearts” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 409).

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

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

Rank the following in order of their impact on you:

1. From rags to riches
2. From hell-bent living (sex, drugs, rock 'n' roll) to holy living
3. From ignorance to understanding
4. From pride to humility
5. From being a selfish oppressor to a selfless liberator
6. From being unnoticed to famous

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

Did you know that top business executives understand the power of our life's story and its effect on business? According to Jim Loehr, author of The Power of Story: Change Your Story, Change Your Destiny in Business and in Life, stories reflect our unique interpretation of our world of experience. "Stories make sense out of chaos; they organize our many divergent experiences into a coherent thread; they shape our entire reality. . . . We give life to something with every story we tell" (http://hpinsti-tute.com/book_power_of_story.html).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the verses leading up to this story where Paul reveals what happened to him. What do you think is the most compelling part of Paul’s testimony? Why?

Underline the words or phrases that you think are critical to understanding its message.

Circle the names of people mentioned in this story and see if you can identify them.

Why do you think the angry crowd fell silent when Paul spoke to them in Hebrew?

Given one opportunity to speak, Paul chose to tell his conversion story rather than try to defend the prejudices people had about him. Why?

Ananias is described as “a devout man according to the law.” Gamaliel and Ananias were two different but devoted Jews. Coupling those names with Paul’s own reputation, what do you think the listeners were feeling as they heard his story?

Who are some other people in Scripture who told their own story of what God had done for them? How did people respond to them?

What do you think is the ultimate message in this story?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

this week’s reading*
The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 37, 38.

faithful in the kangaroo court

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

This week’s lesson features one trial scene of many that the apostle Paul faced during the last two years of his life. While Paul knew that going to Jerusalem would be dangerous, he did not know the plan God had for him to go to Rome, where he would write and encourage believers as well as citizens and leaders in Rome to follow Christ. In fact, Paul was ready to die in Jerusalem if that would awaken more to the gospel. In this lesson Paul stood before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. He was falsely accused by the leaders of the Jews. When the Jewish leaders seemed to be losing influence and their false accusations did not convince those judging Paul, they organized a plot to have him assassinated. Furthermore, when Paul was before Festus he appealed to the authority of Caesar, and with those words he was set on a journey away from the tyranny of the Jews to the secular court of Rome. This journey taken by land and sea offered many moments where God’s hand guided and covered His servant, demonstrating the truth that God has a plan and no ruler or king can thwart His cause.

Nevertheless, there is also the theme of personal integrity and character that emerges in this lesson as well. Young people are challenged to face the uncertain future of trials by preparing today by living a life devoted to Christ. As their character is shaped by their faithful walk with God, they will be able to stand as Paul did, with the conviction and peace that transcends human power.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Discover the way character is revealed in trials. (Know)
- Sense the camaraderie with others who take their stand for God. (Feel)
- Determine to practice their faithfulness today so they can stand tomorrow. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- Justice
- Integrity
- Persecution

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.

Either/or activities call for students to take a side and defend it. More often than not, the theme is such that either point of view is true, but taking a side helps to see deeper into the issues than simply agreeing or disagreeing. In this lesson the activity calls for students to evaluate what is worse: unjust punishment or unimaginable mercy. Some students may struggle with the idea that just because criminals miss the judgment
of men does not mean they escape the judgment of God. However, arguably when innocent people suffer unfairly God knows and will hold others to account as well as reward those who suffer. Some may even say, “We all have sinned and deserve death.” And while we wouldn’t argue that point, we do feel unsatisfied by justice when it is given solely by human wisdom.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

“If there are two truths that are embedded deep within our human experience, they are our need for justice and our love of mercy. We love justice when someone who deserves it gets it, and we embrace mercy when we, who need it, receive it.

“For example, consider a few convicted felons now walking the streets today: Gregory Walls served 17 years of a 50-year sentence; Michael Anthony Williams served 23 years of a life sentence; and Alejandro Fernandez served 10 years of a death sentence.

“How does it make you feel to know these men were convicted of violent crimes and only served less than half their time?

“They are currently out on the street walking free today, and free they should be. These men were released, not prematurely, but much later than they should have been because they were convicted based upon mistaken identity and, in some cases, false testimony. It was only after new technology with DNA testing and the earnest effort of an organization called the Innocence Project that they were exonerated. Recently, more than 200 people who were falsely convicted, sentenced, and served time in prison have been set free.

“How do you feel when the guilty go free and the innocent get punished? Very few emotions are stronger than our sense of justice. How do you feel when you don’t get what you deserve—whether it is good or bad? How do you feel when you or others get mercy when they don’t deserve it?” (From Twenty Questions God Wants to Ask You, by Troy Fitzgerald)

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

We all long for mercy when we need it and are terribly passionate about justice when it has to do with bad people receiving their punishment. In this week’s story, Paul was falsely accused and mistreated by people who were supposed to be leaders of God’s people. This petty self-absorbed behavior revealed their true character, as it also showed what kind of man Paul was. Read the following story of Paul’s trial and answer the questions that guide you through the study.

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.

• How would you describe the attitude and behavior of the chief priests and the Jewish leaders in this story?
• How do you think the Jewish leaders could justify a plot to murder Paul before he was even tried?
• How do you see Paul’s confidence in God’s leading in this story?
• What lessons for life do you see growing out of this story?

Extra Questions for Teachers:

• What other stories in Scripture display people who are doing evil, thinking they are doing what is good? How do those stories compare with this one?
• How would you describe Festus in this episode? Read chapter 40 in The Acts of the Apostles for more insight into this exchange between the Jewish leaders, Paul, and Festus.
• What do you think is the key phrase or verse in this passage? Why?
• Paul would rather be tried by a judge that was not a believer than by the Sanhedrin. What does that say about the integrity of the Jewish leaders? Why do you think Paul would trust a secular judge?
• What qualities of Paul were brought to light as he was treated so unfairly? If it is true that adversity reveals your true colors, what were Paul’s?
• When Paul appealed to be tried by Caesar, as was his right as a Roman citizen, he chose a path that would take his case to Rome. How did Paul know he was doing the right thing?
• How should we regard human authorities who are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of meting out justice? How do you know when to submit to authorities or stand up and call for a higher authority?
In what ways have you noticed the way trials expose the true nature of our character?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Psalm 26:1-3; Proverbs 11:3-5; 21:3; Acts 24:1-9, 22-27; 26.

Sharing Context and Background

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

This lesson features one courtroom scene but covers chapters 24-28 in the book of Acts. The primary focus of the lesson is on Paul's character in trials and his appeal to be tried as a Roman citizen by Caesar. However, the names of some of the other people are obscure and may not be well known, so a brief description of who they are as background is given below.

Chief priests—Levites from the line of Aaron who served God in the Temple and were key leaders of Israel and political power brokers in the Sanhedrin, the legal ruling body of the Jews.

Ananias—The Jewish high priest who was corrupt and tried to falsely accuse Paul of sedition. Ananias had been tried for unlawful violence to Samaritans in Rome, but was acquitted through his relationship with Agrippa. Ananias was eventually murdered by a Jewish mob at the outset of the Jewish War around A.D. 67.

Tertullus—A professional speechmaker hired by the Jewish leaders to prosecute Paul. He tried flattery in Acts 24:1-4. This was false, however, because Felix was a bad man and everyone knew it.

Felix—A Roman procurator (like Pilate) of the region of Judea. Felix was a horribly immoral man and an evil ruler. He had three wives and believed he was capable of doing whatever he wanted because he had so much influence with the authorities. It was during the time of Felix that the Sicarii or the Zealots multiplied because justice was nowhere to be found during his rule.

Festus—Festus replaced Felix as procurator of Judea. Felix had put Paul in prison where he remained until Festus came to rule. Festus had scruples and a sense of law. He did not allow the Jews to conspire to assassinate Paul and, instead, sent Paul to be tried by Caesar upon Paul's request.

King Agrippa II—His father was the same Agrippa I who persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem, and his grandfather was Herod the Great. Agrippa II desired to see Paul before Paul was sent to Rome.

True to form, the Jews broke their own vows and laws to try to beat, prosecute without witnesses, and even assassinate Paul, whose message of Christ threatened their position among the Jewish people. It was against Jewish law even to bring charges without witnesses. It was against the law to assault or physically harm anyone who had not been proven guilty. It was well beyond the spirit of Jewish law to kill someone who was acquitted. In fact, Jewish law was designed to protect the innocent even if it let the guilty go free. There was a sense that God would judge and issue punishment when man's efforts fell short.

It is also important to note that Paul remained in

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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.
prison in Caesarea for more than two years, between the time of Felix and Festus (A.D. 57-60). The voyage to Rome happened in A.D. 60, and Paul remained in Rome for another two years in prison there before he was executed.

III. CLOSING

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

Choose three people in the Bible (or in your church) who are beyond reproach that would be good candidates to put on trial. Ask the question: “What would be a ridiculous charge to put against this individual?” For example, you could never question in court Esther’s love and courage on behalf of her people. It would be hard to say about Joseph that he was not faithful when life went against him. It would be false to say about Peter, “He was quiet and should have spoken up more.” You can even pair up in the class and make statements about each other (be nice) that everyone knows would be untrue because their life speaks differently. Share these false accusations and celebrate your own court where you affirm the character and life of people in spite of accusations. The goal of this activity is to demonstrate how character and the way you live can speak to your defense the way it did for Paul in his season of trials.

Summary
Share the following thoughts in your own words:
The more you watch Paul in action, the more you admire his devotion and wisdom. Under the duress of persecution it seemed that Paul was alone in his defense of the gospel—not to mention his own life. But Paul stood tall before authorities who used every ounce of energy available to convict him and put him to death. Although his accusers were liars, they were powerful. And in our world when it seems as though the people in power are determined to follow their own evil desires, God is still in control and His plan will not be thwarted. In fact, this story urges us to be devoted to Christ and let God be our judge. While we submit to earthly authorities, people are often selfish and wrong and they do not always follow the promptings of God’s Spirit. Only by our continual trust in God’s grace and His promise to lead us through our trials will we emerge victorious. It has everything to do with how you choose to relate to Christ today! People who are true in the peaceful times are victorious in persecution, even in death. Paul was willing to stay faithful to God whatever the outcome. Are you?

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 39, 40, 41, 42.
When the darkness is deepest, the light of a godlike character will shine the brightest. When every other trust fails, then it will be seen who have an abiding trust in Jehovah. And while the enemies of truth are on every side, watching the Lord’s servants for evil, God will watch over them for good” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 432).

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

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

Kangaroo Court

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

“The concept of kangaroo court dates to the early nineteenth century. Scholars trace its origin to the historical practice of itinerant judges on the U.S. frontier. These roving judges were paid on the basis of how many trials they conducted, and in some instances their salary depended on the fines from the defendants they convicted. The term kangaroo court comes from the image of these judges hopping from place to place, guided less by concern for justice than by the desire to wrap up as many trials as the day allowed.”

(Acts 25:1-12, NIV)

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

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

When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him.

They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them.

“They then Paul made his defense: ‘I have done nothing wrong against Jewish law or against the temple or against Caesar.’

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

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

“I appeal to Caesar.” Roman law was absolute in this matter.
How would you describe the attitude and behavior of the chief priests and the Jewish leaders in this story?

How do you think the Jewish leaders could justify a plot to murder Paul before he was even tried?

How would you describe Festus in this episode? (Read chapter 40 in The Acts of the Apostles for more insight into this exchange between the Jewish leaders, Paul, and Festus.)

What do you think is the key phrase or verse in this passage? Why?

Paul would rather be tried by a judge that was not a believer than by the Sanhedrin. What does that say about the integrity of the Jewish leaders? Why do you think Paul would trust a secular judge?

What qualities of Paul are brought to light as he is treated so unfairly? If it is true that adversity reveals your true colors, what are Paul’s?

What lessons for life do you see growing out of this story?

punch lines

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

“The righteous lead blameless lives; blessed are their children after them” (Proverbs 20:7, NIV).

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

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

other eyes

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

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

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, think of some times in your life when you might have been falsely accused or misunderstood by people who thought they were doing what is right. What examples from Paul’s experience can you apply to your life? Also, think about the times when you were wrong but never received what you deserved—justice. In this story, Paul is a model of integrity, but he also stands up for himself. When should Christians stand up for themselves and when should they appeal to a higher court, the court of heaven? Think of some scenarios where this might apply.

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

The Bible History My Life

How does their trust in God help them to be brave and at peace in times of persecution?

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

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

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

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

wearing someone else’s clothes

Scripture Story: Philemon.  
Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapter 43.  
Key Text: Philemon 8.

I. SYNOPSIS

The Christian life is a difficult journey. In fact, life in general can be tough. However, we can take comfort in the knowledge that God did not design for us to go through life alone. We are made to be sociable, and compassion is a key component in surviving the challenges in life. Compassion means we carry each other’s burdens. In Colossians 3:12 Paul writes: “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (NIV).

To be compassionate is to have a keen sympathy for the sufferings of others, accompanied by a deep urge to help. As followers and emulators of Christ, we need to exemplify the attitudes of mercy and pity, even when the aggrieved is ourselves. This is not to say that we allow injustice to prevail. Rather, when faced with sincere repentance, we must dig deep to find the compassion to forgive and, if possible, restore relationships.

Ellen White writes: “The apostle reminded Philemon that every good purpose and trait of character which he possessed was due to the grace of Christ; this alone made him different from the perverse and the sinful. The same grace could make the debased criminal a child of God and a useful laborer in the gospel” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 457).

It is the aim of this study to have the students consider the meaning of compassion; what it looks like; how to apply it; and why it is a key element in the Christian life.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Understand the biblical meaning and application of compassion. (Know)
• Be challenged to acts of compassion. (Feel)
• Perform acts of compassion as led by the Holy Spirit. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Forgiveness
• Repentance
• Grace and mercy

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.

Bring two identical sets of clothes (preferably oversized) and two balloons. Get four student volunteers. If you prefer, you can divide the class by gender and have the boys compete against the girls. One person from each pair of volunteers will be the contestant; the other will be the assistant. The aim of the game is to put on all of the clothes over their own, while keeping the balloon in the air. The only person allowed to touch the balloon is the contestant. The assistant’s duty is to
get the clothes ready and pass them to the contestant. If the balloon touches the ground, the contestant must take off one of the items of clothing and start again. The first team to get all the clothes on their contestant wins!

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In the movie Patch Adams the character Patch Adams is a medical resident who wants to do things differently. At one point in the movie, he says, “You treat a disease, you win, you lose. You treat a person, I’ll guarantee you’ll win.” It is this philosophy that Patch Adams applies to his medical career. He works hard to help patients feel better emotionally as well as physically.

In one particularly memorable scene, Patch and two other fellow residents sneak into the hospital ward one night and fulfill the fantasy of a terminally ill patient. This patient has always wanted to go big game hunting. Armed with balloons and a rubber dart gun, Patch and his friends recreate the big game hunting experience for the patient. Although the patient cannot be cured, he feels much better knowing that Patch really listened to him and remembered his deepest wish to go on a safari.

Patch felt for his patients and tried to help them. He is a great example of a man filled with compassion. Jesus had the same kind of reaction many times. The Bible records many stories of how Jesus was moved to help other people.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Ask the students if anyone can remember any stories of Jesus showing compassion and helping people. Then share the following stories from Scripture in your own words:

- Matthew 14:14 (Jesus heals the sick.)
- John 4:4-26 (Jesus visits with the Samaritan woman at the well.)
- Luke 5:17-26 (Jesus heals a paralytic.)
- Mark 10:46-52 (Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus.)
- Matthew 9:18-26 (Jesus heals a dead girl and a sick woman.)

It is easy to say that Jesus could do all of these because He is God. However, we can still show compassion and help others in our own way.

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 actors in this story.
- Underline the parts of the story that are essential to understanding it.
- Share any aspects of the story that are new to you.
- Paul offered to repay Onesimus’ debt if it made it easier for Philemon to accept him back into the household. Discuss what this teaches us about compassion.
- What new thing about God have you learned from Onesimus’ story? Explain.
- Draw a rectangle around the emotions, actions, and adjectives that enrich this story.
- What lesson from this story will you apply to your life?
- Put a star next to the words or phrases that capture the various emotions of this story.

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

- Read Colossians 3:12 and compare Paul’s actions to help Onesimus. Why do you think Paul would choose to help Onesimus to this extent?
- Read Ephesians 4:32. Imagine if you were Philemon. What would your response be toward this wayward servant after having read Paul’s impassioned letter?
- Read Philippians 2:1-4. What does a follower of Christ behave like?

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. Understanding the historical setting of slavery in Rome during Paul’s time

According to the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, slaves were an accepted part of society and considered to be members of their master’s household. It was so common that the proportion of free men to slaves was three to one. At that time in Rome a slave had no rights, and their masters held power of life and death over them. This was not to say that the life of a slave was arbitrarily torturous. In fact, some slaves were known to be teachers, doctors, and managers of their master’s estates.
2. **Applying the compassion of Christ**

   Ellen White offers this commentary on Paul's letter to Philemon: “Paul voluntarily proposed to assume the debt of Onesimus in order that the guilty one might be spared the disgrace of punishment, and might again enjoy the privileges he had forfeited. ‘If thou count me therefore a partner,’ he wrote to Philemon, ‘receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it.’ How fitting an illustration of the love of Christ for the repentant sinner! The servant who had defrauded his master had nothing with which to make restitution. The sinner who has robbed God of years of service has no means of canceling the debt. Jesus interposes between the sinner and God, saying, I will pay the debt. Let the sinner be spared; I will suffer in his stead” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 458).

3. **Paul's compassionate rhetorical skills toward Philemon**

   Although Paul could have leveraged on his standing as an elder and an apostle and demanded that Philemon take Onesimus back (verses 8, 9), that would run contradictory to the compassionate response that Paul was trying to evoke from Philemon. How could Philemon make a charitable decision if he felt coerced? Compassion cannot be forced. As much as Paul was a compassionate advocate of Onesimus, he also treated Philemon with compassion, and in turn, asked that Onesimus be treated the same.

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**Tips for Top-notch Teaching**

**Positive Reinforcement**

It is not unusual for some students to find lessons boring or overwhelming. Try positive reinforcement. Don’t give empty praises but do take note of any progress made and acknowledge it, no matter how small.

If you made any agreements with your students about their homework (e.g., you will allow snacks for everyone if they come with lessons prepared), then make sure you follow through on your agreement.

Finally, be positive and supportive. Teens respond not just to the work but to the person conducting the lessons. They will be more open and cooperative if they know that they can trust you.

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In what variety of means and mediums can we apply Christ’s compassion?

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**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

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

Invite the students to create a list titled “Top Ten...”

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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.
Ways to Show Compassion.” When they have finished, have each student read their list. After everyone has had the chance to share their ideas, have the students vote on their top 10 favorites. Compile those into a master list and type it up, photocopy it, and ask them to put it in a place where they can read it often. Challenge them to put the ideas into practice and then discuss the results the following week in Sabbath School.

**Summary**

*Share this story from Brian Cavanaugh’s book The Sower’s Seeds:*

There is an old Chinese tale about a woman whose only son died. In her grief, she went to the holy man and said, “What prayers, what magical incantations do you have to bring my son back to life?”

Instead of sending her away or reasoning with her, he said to her, “Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive the sorrow out of your life.” The woman went off at once in search of that magical mustard seed.

She came first to a splendid mansion, knocked at the door, and said, “I am looking for a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place? It is very important to me.”

They told her, “You’ve certainly come to the wrong place,” and began to describe all the tragic things that recently had befallen them.

The woman said to herself, “Who is better able to help these poor, unfortunate people than I, who have had misfortune of my own?” She stayed to comfort them, then went on in search of a home that had never known sorrow. But wherever she turned, in hovels and in other places, she found one tale after another of sadness and misfortune. She became so involved in ministering to other people’s grief that ultimately she forgot about her quest for the magical mustard seed, never realizing that it had, in fact, driven the sorrow out of her life (www.inspirationalstories.com/1/130.html).

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 43.
Among those who gave their hearts to God through the labors of Paul in Rome was Onesimus, a pagan slave who had wronged his master, Philemon, a Christian believer in Colosse, and had escaped to Rome. In the kindness of his heart, Paul sought to relieve the poverty and distress of the wretched fugitive and then endeavored to shed the light of truth into his darkened mind. Onesimus listened to the words of life, confessed his sins, and was converted to the faith of Christ” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 456).

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love.”

(Philemon 8, 9, NIV)
Think of a time when you had to borrow someone else’s clothes to wear. What did you have to wear? Did anything funny happen as a result? Were you able to find something you liked or suited your tastes? Or did you feel silly and uncomfortable because the outfits were “sooo not you”?

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

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

Paul wrote Colossians, and he also wrote Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 he uses the same word when referring to God as the “Father of mercies.”

We can infer that Paul is saying that we are filled with a sense of compassion when we see someone is hurting, and we feel the urge to want to make things better, to help in some way. Compassion is not just an act for show. It should be a gut reaction—coming from deep inside.

“I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.

“Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who was separated from you for a little while. I have sent him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

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

(Philemon 1:4-21, NIV)
“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, NIV).

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

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

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

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Philippians 2:1-4, NIV).

“When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when we receive advice about where to go or what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Sometimes, perhaps. But what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares.” — Henri Nouwen, Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life (Doubleday, 1983).
Sabbath

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

- Acts 2:42-47
- Galatians 6:2
- Colossians 3:12
- 2 Corinthians 1:3

Sunday

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

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

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

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

Monday

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

Tuesday

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

- Repentance
- Forgiveness
- Compassion

Wednesday

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

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

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

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

Thursday

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

Friday

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


this week’s reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapter 43.

* 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 www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.U9hF1fBO9t. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
a good report

Scripture Story: Colossians; Philippians.
Key Text: Colossians 3:17.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
The Flashlight quote of the week speaks about the apostle Paul’s trials and his imprisonment for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The trials that Paul faced were instrumental in drawing more attention to the gospel. It even gave him opportunity to witness to the prison guards in Caesar’s court. In your presentation of the lesson for this week you can show how the daily challenges and difficulties we may face in school, at home, on the job, or in our neighborhoods can be opportunities for witnessing, simply in the way we choose to handle these difficult situations. It may even be that God allowed certain circumstances to arise in our lives for the specific purpose of blessing, helping, or witnessing to someone else. There are several Bible examples that can be used in comparison to Paul’s experience. Joseph found himself in a dreadful situation because of betrayal, but the Lord used his circumstances to help save the lives of thousands of people during a time of famine (see Genesis 41:55-57). In the story of Mordecai and Esther, Mordecai challenged Esther to have courage in facing the king when he said, “Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14, NKJV).

Though none of us want to face difficulties and trials, we can see these times as opportunities for lifting up the name of Christ in our words and deeds. Just as in the cases of Joseph, Queen Esther, and Paul, in the end we will be rewarded for our loyalty to the Lord.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Understand that trials and even persecution may be opportunities for witnessing. (Know)
• Feel the desire to be Christ’s representatives in word and deed in every circumstance of life. (Feel)
• Make the commitment to be a blessing and a light to others. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
• Evangelism/witnessing
• Influence
• Reputations

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.

Have the class participants work in twos or threes to complete the What Do You Think? section of the lesson. Tell each group to add at least three things that are not listed that they consider to be everyday acts of faith. After a few minutes, discuss with the class the correlation between our actions and our influence on those around us. Be prepared to give a couple of examples yourself.
Illustration

Read the following quotes from The Great Controversy, pages 39 to 41, to the class, or share the account in your own words. It depicts the state of the early Christian church not long after Jesus left the earth and ascended into heaven:

"The fires of persecution were kindled. Christians were stripped of their possessions and driven from their homes. They 'endured a great fight of afflictions.' Hebrews 10:32. They 'had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment.' Hebrews 11:36. Great numbers sealed their testimony with their blood. Noble and slave, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, were alike slain without mercy."

"Christians were falsely accused of the most dreadful crimes, and declared to be the cause of great calamities—famine, pestilence, and earthquake."

"Wherever they sought refuge, the followers of Christ were hunted like beasts of prey. They were forced to seek concealment in desolate and solitary places. 'Destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.' Verses 37, 38."

"Under the fiercest persecution these witnesses for Jesus kept their faith unsullied. Though deprived of every comfort, shut away from the light of the sun, making their home in the dark but friendly bosom of the earth, they uttered no complaint. With words of faith, patience, and hope they encouraged one another to endure privation and distress. The loss of every earthly blessing could not force them to renounce their belief in Christ."

- Why do you think the early Christian church experienced such persecution?
- Are people persecuted for their religious beliefs today? If so, give an example.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Have you ever been accused of doing something you didn’t do? Have you ever been punished when you were innocent of all charges? This week we will discuss the imprisonment of Paul the apostle, who was placed on house arrest and tried, even though he committed no crime. And we will learn that many other Christians were persecuted and punished for preaching the gospel. We will discover that in our own experiences as Christians we may face unjust treatment.

But even in the face of such trials, we must persevere and continue to uplift the name of Jesus by our words and actions.

Out of the Story for Teachers

Read or review the Into the Story section with your class. Then complete and discuss the following activity with the group:

1. Name three positive things that happened as a result of Paul’s imprisonment.
2. Give an example of something in your own life that reminds you of Paul’s experience.
3. Name someone else in the Bible who was thrown in prison or punished for preaching or for their loyalty to God.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Genesis 41:37-57; Esther 4:1-16.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on specific aspects of the story for your students.

1. Before Paul became a believer he persecuted Christians. He really believed that they were going against the will of God by preaching that Jesus was the Son of God. When he was converted and became a Christian himself, many believers were afraid of him. They were not convinced that he had been converted. After hearing about his experience on the road to Damascus, of how Jesus appeared to him and changed his name from Saul to Paul, and how Paul became a true follower of Christ, the Christian believers finally accepted him and welcomed him into their fellowship (Acts 9:20-28).

2. From the very beginning of Paul’s ministry the Jews sought to kill him, the man they had known as Saul (Acts 9:23). After his conversion, he spent some time in Damascus preaching and teaching about Jesus. He then went on to Jerusalem and stayed with the believers there. Again, the Jews tried to kill him for speaking out about their pagan practices. So Paul moved on to travel to other regions, preaching the gospel. (See Acts 9:20-31.)

3. Believers were first called Christians in a place called Antioch (Acts 11:26). In many places the gospel was preached only to the Jews. But in Antioch the message of the gospel was preached to the Greeks also (Acts 11:19-21). Paul spent a whole year in Antioch with a faithful man name Barnabas, preaching and
Teaching in the churches there (Acts 11:24-26). The Lord spoke to the ministers in Antioch, telling them that He had a very special work for Paul and Barnabas. So they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and prayed a special prayer of blessing over them. Then they sent the two missionaries off to do the work that God had called them to do (Acts 13:1, 2). Paul and Barnabas were sent by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel not only to the Jews, but to the non-Jews also (Acts 13:16, 43-48).

4. Paul and Barnabas traveled to many regions. On one occasion they returned to Antioch. There they found a dispute among the believers about whether or not the non-Jewish believers should be circumcised. Some of the Jewish Christians thought that those who were not circumcised could not be saved. Paul and Barnabas spoke to the people about their ministry to non-Jews, and of how many people were converted and accepted Christ. They spoke of the many miracles that had been performed among the non-Jewish believers. Peter was there also, and gave testimony of how God also had called him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. After much discussion, many of the Jewish Christians agreed that some of the old Jewish laws were not a requirement for salvation (Acts 15:1-35).

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Hand out paper and pencils to class members. Have each person write a short paragraph describing something they will do differently in the upcoming week to show the love of Christ, or to be a witness in word or deed to someone they may interact with on a regular basis. Tell class members to focus on situa-
tions that have been difficult for them before. After a few minutes, ask those who wish to participate to trade papers with another class member. Have a few people read the paragraph of their partners out loud to the whole group. (Example: Mary’s paragraph says she will . . .) Read two or three, or as many as time permits.

Summary

Share with the class the following passage, which was written by Paul to the Romans:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:14-21, NIV).

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 44, 45.
a good report

Scripture Story: Colossians; Philippians.

flashlight

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

keytext

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

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

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

**did you know?**

Using the analogy of an iceberg, our conscious mind can be understood as the small part of the iceberg that is above water that everyone can see. The subconscious mind is the much larger and vaster part of the iceberg submerged under the water that cannot readily be seen. Our deepest conflicts reside in the deepest part of the iceberg and are the most difficult to uncover.

“We... can direct the subconscious influences on our feelings and actions by implanting powerful images in our conscious mind on a consistent basis”

*(Brilliant Babies, Powerful Adults, John Mike, M.D., pp. 55, 59, 60, Satori Press International, 1997).*

As we contemplate the life of Christ and fill our minds with the stories and principles found in God’s holy Book, we will be “implanting powerful images in our conscious mind.” These images will shape our thoughts and prompt us to do and say the things that will be becoming of children of the King. One of the greatest witnesses is the Christlike actions of the child of God.

**INTO THE STORY**

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

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

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

“Brothers and sisters, here is what I want you to know. What has happened to me has really helped to spread the good news. One thing has become clear. I am being held by chains because of my stand for Christ. All of the palace guards and everyone else know it. Because I am being held by chains, most of the believers in the Lord have become bolder. They now speak God’s word more boldly and without fear.”

“I completely expect and hope that I won’t be ashamed in any way. I’m sure I will be brave enough. Now as always Christ will be lifted high through my body. He will be lifted up whether I live or die.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday

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

Monday

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

- Behavior
- Testimony
- Conviction
- Observer
- Visual
- Announcement

Conduct ________ Witness ________
Example ________ Message ________
Report ________ Belief ________

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

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________

Wednesday

Joseph always conducted himself as a child of God, even in the face of adversity. He never retaliated or sought revenge on those who had done him wrong. Potiphar was so impressed with the way Joseph carried himself that he put Joseph, who was a slave, in charge of his whole household. 

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

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________
4. ____________________

Thursday

Complete the following sentences.

1. And the Lord will deliver me from every ________ and ________ me for His heavenly kingdom. (2 Timothy 4:18, NKJV)
2. For God has not given us a ________ of ____________, but of power and of love and of a ____________. (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV)
3. There is laid up for me the ____________, which the Lord, the righteous ____________, will give to me on that Day. (2 Timothy 4:8, NKJV)

Friday

When Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he was hearing good reports of the Christian believers in the nearby cities and towns, reports of the good work they were doing to spread the gospel of Jesus, and of their loving interactions with one another. In turn he gave them a good report of his experiences in Rome. As a prisoner he was still rejoicing in the Lord and witnessing to the guards and those in Caesar’s household.

Paul’s story is an example to us of how vital our Christian conduct is in witnessing and spreading the love of Christ. Many hearts can be won to Christ just by watching the good example of someone else. Can you name someone in your own life who has been a witness or a good example to you?

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

To illustrate the theme of this lesson, we look to the words of Ellen White: “The desire for love and sympathy is implanted in the heart by God Himself. Christ, in His hour of agony in Gethsemane, longed for the sympathy of His disciples. And Paul, though apparently indifferent to hardship and suffering, yearned for sympathy and companionship. The visit of Onesiphorus, testifying to his fidelity at a time of loneliness and desertion, brought gladness and cheer to one who had spent his life in service for others” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 491).

This lesson helps students see that being a follower of Christ does not mean automatic immunity against the struggles of life. There are still irritations, loneliness, doubts, and frustrations. Staying focused on godly things and perspectives can prove difficult while dealing with their own self-disappointments and questions. This is why God created the church and sacrificed His own Son, so that we can be adopted into this spiritual family (see Ephesians 1:5).

The church is meant to be a spiritual family that will love and honor each other. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul exhorts them to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10, NIV). Paul himself was blessed to experience the very comfort and “good" deeds of fellow believers during his time of imprisonment and loneliness. His experience of authentic fellowship is underscored in 2 Timothy—this week’s Scripture story. God provided comfort to Paul through the loving-kindness of Onesiphorus and other like-hearted believers.

However, we do not help others out simply because it is a command from our Father. We help because it can also alleviate our own pain. Instead of focusing on our own needs and becoming consumed with self-pity, focusing on the needs of others enables us to channel our energies in a more productive manner. Paul exemplified this in 2 Timothy 4:17. Despite imprisonment, his goal was still to share God’s message of hope and healing.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Understand that being a Christian is not without challenges. (Know)
• Realize that God formed the church—His spiritual family—to be His extension of encouragement and empowerment. (Feel)
• Be challenged to assess their role and commitment as a part of God’s family and reach out to other hurting people around them. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Community
• Fellowship
• Loneliness
• Church family

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.

Take your students outside (or into a large room with enough space for them to spread out). Choose two of your more confident students to participate in a little experiment. They should move far enough away that they are unable to communicate but still close enough to see and hear that something is going on in the main group. Ask these two students not to say anything, but just sit there until you call them back.

Start a fun discussion about something your students will enjoy talking and laughing about (a silly song on the radio, an action movie, etc). After awhile, call the two volunteers back to the group and ask these questions:

• How did you feel when you were separated from the group?
• Did you have stuff you wanted to add to the conversation?
• How did not being allowed to participate make you feel?
• Is being alone easy or difficult for you? Why?

Then to the entire group ask: “Do you think it’s possible to be sitting with a group and still be lonely?” Ask them to explain their responses.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Have your students stand and see how long they can balance on one foot while holding their other leg out behind them (not touching the floor) and stretching out their arms like airplane wings. After a few minutes, it should become difficult for most students to maintain their balance.

Ask: “What are a couple of ways we could train our bodies to allow us to balance for a longer period of time?” Let your students share their suggestions.

Now have them do the activity again, except this time line them up side by side and instruct them to grab hands with the students on each side of them and help each other remain balanced. Afterward, ask your students to explain the point of this illustration as it relates to the body of Christ.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

There is a misconception that when you become a Christian you will never feel angry, sad, depressed, lonely, or any other negative feeling. However, that cannot be further from the truth. Look in the Bible and you will find that many of the great leaders, at some point or another, felt despair. Elijah was persecuted and fell into a state of depression, while Paul was imprisoned and no doubt experienced bouts of loneliness. Both had their pain alleviated by a simple, caring gesture from another human being. We were not meant to live alone. We were made to live as a community.

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 is the situation that Paul is in here? What is happening to him?
• Share any aspects of the story that are new to you.
• Paul mentions some people who have helped him and some who have hurt him. What can we learn from their actions and consequences?
• What are your goals in life? What do you spend your time on and what do you need to start spending more time with?
• Are your relationships your first priority? What can you do to ensure that they are? What sacrifices do you need to make?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Romans 1:12 (NLT): “When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours.”

It is easier to stay consistent in our faith when we are surrounded with nurturing and caring fellow believers. Repeatedly in the New Testament we are told to do different tasks for “one another” and “each other.” You are not responsible for the rest of the church family. However, you are responsible to them. God expects you to do your best to help each other.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light
had already sentenced Paul to death.

2. Theme. This letter has been referred to as Paul’s last will and testament. It is a personal letter to Timothy but also to the church in general. interspersed through this letter, Paul asks for visits from his friends and for his scrolls. In these last words he reveals his loneliness and strong love for his family in Christ.

3. Outline. Paul pours his heart into this last letter, and it reveals his priorities and goals. In this letter he exhorts Timothy to be a faithful successor, encouraging him to continue the work of building God’s church. He also gives an insight into the traits of a good leader, advising believers on the methods of communicating God’s truth, and offers warnings of perilous times to come and final words of encouragement and edification. This reveals a man with steadfast faith, confident endurance, and a lasting love.

III. CLOSING

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

Sit the students in a circle. Give each student a piece of paper and a pen. Instruct them to write their name at the top. Now pass the paper clockwise (or counterclockwise). The person receiving the paper should look at the name and write down an encouraging word, a note affirming the contributions that per...
son has made to the group, or compliments on their unique qualities, etc.

When the papers have completed the round, each student should get back their own paper. Allow some time for your students to read their papers and then ask: Do you feel differently about the group now that you have had a chance to read the positive messages other people have written? Was it easy to write positive messages? How did it feel?

**Summary**

*Share the following story in your own words:*

Randy Frazee has written a book called *The Connecting Church*. He has a son who was born without a left hand. One day in Sunday School the teacher was talking with the children about the church. To illustrate her point she folded her hands together and said, “Here’s the church, here’s the steeple; open the doors and see all the people.” She asked the class to do it along with her—obviously not thinking about his son’s inability to pull this exercise off. Then it dawned on her that the boy wouldn’t be able to join in. Before she could do anything about it, the little boy next to his son, a friend of his from the time they were babies, reached out his left hand and said, “Let’s do it together.” The two boys proceeded to join their hands together to make the church and the steeple. Frazee says, “This hand exercise should never be done again by an individual because the church is not a collection of individuals, but the one body of Christ.”

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 46, 47.
The desire for love and sympathy is implanted in the heart by God Himself. Christ, in His hour of agony in Gethsemane, longed for the sympathy of His disciples. And Paul, though apparently indifferent to hardship and suffering, yearned for sympathy and companionship. The visit of Onesiphorus, testifying to his fidelity at a time of loneliness and desertion, brought gladness and cheer to one who had spent his life in service for others” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 491).
According to various scientific researches, people who are actively involved in church tend to experience improved health and longevity. Why do you think that is? Do a bit of reading up, and make a list of the top three possible reasons why being part of church community would lead to better health. Share your answers with your class.

Rabbi Naomi Levy, author of the books Talking to God and To Begin Again, writes: “A community of faith can provide more than support when we are in need of help. The members of a faith community can strengthen our resolve to heal, can link their prayers to ours, and can restore us to faith. They can envelop us in caring and love.

“Mark was a man in my community who was depressed after heart surgery. He started losing weight and his doctors were concerned that he had given up on life. When I let some of my congregants know about Mark’s condition they moved into action. They began taking him meals, visiting him at home, offering prayers and blessings. Even though he protested a bit, one woman started driving him to synagogue where he was showered with blessings, prayers, and song. Mark’s transformation was remarkable. Suddenly he started to thrive, eating his meals and laughing again.”

into the story

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

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

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

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

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

“May the Lord show mercy to the family of Onesiphorus, because he cheered me up many times. He was not ashamed that I am in prison, but as soon as he arrived in Rome, he started looking for me until he found me. May the Lord grant him his mercy on that Day! . . .

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

“But the Lord stood with me and gave me strength so that I might preach the Good News in its entirety for all the Gentiles to hear. And he rescued me from certain death. Yes, and the Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely into his heavenly Kingdom. All glory to God forever and ever! Amen. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila and those living in the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed at Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick at Miletus. Do your best to get here before winter.”
List the people mentioned in these passages. What does Paul say they have done or are to do? What actions helped Paul and what hurt him?

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

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

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

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

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

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

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

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

“One can acquire everything in solitude except character.”—Marie Henri Beyle, 19th-century French biographer and writer
Sabbath
Read and respond to the ranking exercise in the What Do You Think? section of this week’s lesson. It takes courage and humility to forgive an authentic relationship. It means being honest and open about our own flaws and accepting and forgiving toward others.

What is one thing you can do today to cultivate a more honest and heartfelt relationship with another believer?

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

- Power _____________________
- Love _____________________
- Self-discipline _____________________

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 www.godandscience.org/apologetics/religionhealth.html.


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this week’s reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 46, 47.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Share the following with the class as an introduction to the lesson:

The apostle Paul had to stand trial before Nero, but he did not have an advocate. There was no one willing to speak in his behalf—no one to defend him. We may find ourselves in situations where we have to stand for what is right, for what we believe in, and there may not be anyone else to side with us or to defend us. We may have to stand alone. Are you willing to stand for the truth, for the Word of God, even if it means standing alone? That is a question every Christian will have to answer someday, if not today. Many believers must stand for the right on their jobs, or at school. Sometimes young people must make the choice to stand for the right among their friends or peers, and they may have to stand alone, because no one else is willing to speak up or to side with them.

There will come a day when all must stand before the Great Judge of the universe. “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10, NKJV). But on that day we can be sure that we will not have to stand alone. It’s a promise. First John 2:1 tells us that Jesus is our Advocate, and Jude 24 tells us that He is able to present us faultless before the throne of God. Since we know that He will stand for us and with us on that day, let us make the choice to stand for Him today, even if it means we must stand alone. But we know that we are not really alone. He is with us— even today.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Understand that every Christian will have to defend his faith. (Know)
• Feel the heartfelt desire to stand for what is right even if it means standing alone. (Feel)
• Choose to do the right thing no matter the consequences. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Perseverance
• Courage
• Witnessing

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.

Have class members work in twos or threes to complete the What Do You Think? section of the lesson. After a few minutes, have each group share their examples with the entire class. Which of the Bible examples given had to stand alone? Which of the examples had someone to stand with them or support them?
Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words.

In March 2009 two American journalists, Laura Ling and Euna Lee, were filming in China near the North Korean border. The two young women were soon arrested by North Korean authorities, and charged with crossing into North Korean territory with hostile intentions. Although they were innocent of any crime, the two journalists were sentenced to 12 years of hard labor. Often innocent people are accused falsely and even punished for crimes they did not commit. This week we will continue to study the life of Paul. False accusations were raised against Paul, which led to his arrest and trial before Nero, and later his death.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words.

We must make choices every day. What clothes should I wear today? Should I finish my homework? Who will my friends be? What should I watch on TV? What music will I listen to? Will I obey my parents? Everything that we do and say is the result of a choice. Often, we aren’t even aware that we are making a choice. It’s just second nature. We do it without thinking about it. In this lesson we will focus on choosing or making the decision to stand for what is right, whatever the outcome may be.

Out of the Story for Teachers

Read or review the Into the Story section with your class. Then complete and discuss the following activity with the group:

1. Name three things that Paul says will happen to people in the last days. How should Christians respond to the people who do these things?
2. What is the reason Paul is suffering and how does he feel about it?
3. Was there ever a time you were ashamed or embarrassed to speak out about something but you had to anyway? Share this experience with the class.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on specific aspects of the story for your students.

In Acts chapters 21 though 28 we read of Paul’s trials and persecution by the Jews in Jerusalem who wanted to kill him because of his teachings. We read of his arrest and imprisonment in Rome. Read through these chapters to get a fuller understanding of the suffering that Paul experienced. Use this information to help you with your presentation of this week’s lesson. “St. Paul, whose earlier Hebrew name was Saul, was ‘of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews’ and in religious respects ‘as touching the law, a Pharisee’ (Philippians 3:5). Acts identifies Paul as from Mediterranean Tarsus, (in present-day south-central Turkey), well-known for its intel-
lectual environment. Acts also claims Paul said he was ‘a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee’ (Acts 23:6).

“According to his own testimony, Paul [as Saul according to Acts] ‘violently persecuted’ the ‘church of God’ (followers of Jesus) prior to his conversion to Christianity (Galatians 1:13, 14; Philippians 3:6; and Acts 8:1-3).

“Paul asserted that he received the gospel not from [any] person, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11, 12).

“Paul’s conversion can be dated to around A.D. 33 by his reference to it in one of his letters. According to the Acts of the Apostles, his conversion . . . took place on the road to Damascus, where he experienced a vision of the resurrected Jesus, after which he was temporarily blinded (Acts 9:1-31; 22:1-22; 26:9-24). . . .

“Most scholars agree that a vital meeting between Paul and the Jerusalem church took place in A.D. 49 or 50. Paul refers to this meeting in Galatians, and Luke describes it in Acts 15. Most think that Galatians 2:1 corresponds to the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. The key question raised was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised (Acts 15:2; Galatians 2:1). At this meeting, Peter, James, and John accepted Paul’s mission to the Gentiles. . . .

“[After spending some time traveling] Paul [returned to] Jerusalem A.D. 57 with a collection of money for the congregation there. Acts reports that the church welcomed Paul gladly, but [he was soon arrested]. Paul caused a stir when he appeared at the Temple, and he escaped being killed by the crowd by being taken into custody. He was held as a prisoner for two years in Caesarea until, in AD 59, a new governor reopened his case. He appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen and was sent to Rome for trial. Acts reports that he was shipwrecked on Malta where he was met by St. Publius (Acts 28:7) and the islanders, who showed him ‘unusual kindness’ (Acts 28:2).

“He arrived in Rome A.D. 60 and spent two years under house arrest. Tradition has said that Paul was beheaded, while Peter was crucified upside down. This account fits with the report from Acts that Paul was a Roman citizen and would have been accorded the more merciful execution [of death by the sword]” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_the_Apostle).

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Pass out paper and pencils to class members. Have each person make a list of situations in which they have had to choose between doing the right thing or taking the easy way out. After each situation listed answer the following questions:

1. What was your choice in this situation?
2. Do you think you did the right thing? If not, what will you do differently next time?
3. If time permits, let those who are willing share their responses with the class.

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 with the class the following quote taken from the book In His Steps, by Charles M. Sheldon (copyright 1985, Barbour and Company, Inc.).

The pastor of a small church made the following proposition to his congregation:

“I want volunteers from the First Church who will pledge themselves, earnestly and honestly for an entire year, not to do anything without first asking the question, ‘What would Jesus do?’ And after asking that question, each one will follow Jesus as exactly as he knows how, no matter what the result may be.

“At the close of the service I want all those members who are willing to join such a company to remain and we will talk over the details of the plan. Our motto will be, ‘What would Jesus do?’ Our aim will be to act just as He would if He was in our places, regardless of immediate results. In other words, we propose to follow Jesus’ steps as closely and as literally as we believe He taught His disciples to do” (In His Steps, p. 15).

Say to your class members: “This question has been used in many trite ways—even to market jewelry! But it’s still a valid question to consider. I challenge you, in everything that you do and say this week, first ask yourself this question—What would Jesus do?”

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 48, 49.
**alone but not defenseless**

**flashlight**

"Among the Greeks and Romans it was customary to allow an accused person the privilege of employing an advocate to plead in his behalf before courts of justice. By force of argument, by impassioned eloquence, or by entreaties, prayers, and tears, such an advocate often secured a decision in favor of the prisoner or, failing in this, succeeded in mitigating the severity of the sentence. But when Paul was summoned before Nero, no man ventured to act as his counsel or advocate; ... Among the Christians at Rome there was not one who came forward to stand by him in that trying hour" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 492).

**keytext**

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

— (2 Timothy 4:8, NKJV)
The apostle Paul faced great persecution for preaching about salvation in the name of Jesus Christ. Can you name two other individuals in the Bible who faced persecution because of their faith and/or obedience to God? Give a brief description of each person’s experience.

1. ____________________________
   ______________________________
   ______________________________

2. ____________________________
   ______________________________
   ______________________________

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live, taking the form of a readiness to die.” —G. K. Chesterton, early-20th-century English author.

**OUT OF THE STORY**

In 2 Timothy 1:8 Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed to be a witness for the Lord, and also not to be ashamed of Paul because of his sufferings for the Lord. Have you ever been embarrassed because of another person’s witness? Have you ever had to defend another person’s witness? Explain.

Reread the quote under Flashlight. When Paul had to stand before Nero, he did not have an advocate. There was no one present to speak in his defense. Who will speak for us when we need an advocate? (Read 1 John 2:1.) When will this take place?

What is the good news that Paul is talking about?

How can you, like Paul, announce the good news to your family, friends, and neighbors?

Why would a person suffer for giving good news?

What does the text say will keep us from becoming selfish, proud, greedy, disobedient, ungrateful, unloving, unforgiving, and thoughtless?

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

“Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live, taking the form of a readiness to die.” —G. K. Chesterton, early-20th-century English author.
 Ellen White writes of some of her special adaptations in chapters 48, 49, pp. 80, 81.

One day Jesus will come to judge the world, and many would be persecuted for their stand for right and for proclaiming the truth. Contemplate the following account of these men of God who suffered great trials for the Word of God. And many would be persecuted for their faith. In the book The Great Controversy Ellen White writes of some of these men of God who suffered great trials for their stand for right and for proclaiming the truth. Contemplate the following account of John Wycliffe. He believed that ordinary men and women should have access to the Bible so that they could read and learn of the truth for themselves instead of simply accepting the interpretation of educated scholars and pontiffs, who would often teach false doctrine:

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

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

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

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**This week’s reading**

_The Acts of the Apostles_ (or _Unlikely Leaders_), chapters 48, 49.

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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

We see John’s temperament on display when he encouraged Jesus to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans who withheld their hospitality from the Savior (Luke 9:54, 55). He was hotheaded indeed, but that defect was perhaps matched by his naked ambition. We see his thirst for prestige when he and James enlisted the aid of their mother to help them gain prominent spots in the kingdom, causing a near meltdown among the other disciples (Matthew 20). John was at best an unfinished project.

In spite of his “issues” John made it a point to hang close to Jesus. The youngest of the disciples, he was impressionable and teachable, willing to be led by a Man whose unconditional love and patience with him simply knocked his socks off. As his three Epistles testify, John had experienced the transforming love of Jesus, and this love became the rule of his life. There is no better exposition on the love of God expressed through Jesus than that found in the book of 1 John.

The core message to be communicated this week is that time spent with Jesus, time spent in the presence of God, is not wasted time. The love of Jesus purifies the character, ennobles the mind, and prepares one to communicate the love of God to others. Jesus can remove the evil traits of character in us and fit us for His service, but none of this can happen in a life that is too busy to know God.

II. TARGET

The students will:

• Know that the love of God has the power to transform their lives into the image of Jesus Christ. (Know)
• Accept the love of God as the principal rule by which they live. (Feel)
• Share the love of God with others that they, too, might come to know God. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Growth/transformation in Christ
• Ambition
• Love is . . .
• Knowing God

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

II. GETTING STARTED

Activity

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

Psychologist and author Dr. Ellen McGrath wrote the following in a Psychology Today article entitled “The Power of Love”: “Love is as critical for your mind and body as oxygen. It’s not negotiable. The more connected you are, the healthier you will be both physically and emotionally. The less connected you are, the more you are at risk.”

McGrath goes on to note that the love she’s speaking about in her piece is not the “love” glamorized in our increasingly entertainment culture. The
What Do You Think? activity is designed to explore some of the misconceptions about love that we unknowingly harbor.

According to the apostle John, love is a Person, love is God (1 John 4:8). God’s love is the only love that positively changes one’s character.

Answers to the True/False quiz: T, F, F, T, F, F, T

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In a March 28, 2008, article featured at Washingtonpost.com, “On Parenting,” columnist Stacy Garfin-kle wrote:

“On Saturday an 18-year-old high school cheerleader from Florida died from complications related to plastic surgery. The girl was having surgery to correct asymmetrical breasts and inverted nipples, the Palm Beach Post reported, when she may have had a deadly reaction to anesthesia.

“Nearly 225,000 plastic surgeries were performed last year on teens, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Breast surgery, nose jobs and laser hair removal are among the most popular procedures. And the surgeries aren’t just happening for girls. More than 16,000 breast reduction surgeries occurred in boys.

“Teenagers seeking plastic surgery usually have different motivations than adults, says the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. "They often have plastic surgery to improve physical characteristics they feel are awkward or flawed, that if left uncorrected, may affect them well into adulthood. Teens tend to have plastic surgery to fit in with peers, to look similar."”

(Source: http://voices.washingtonpost.com/parenting/2008/03/plastic_surgery.html)

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

In a culture obsessed with outward appearance is it any wonder that teenagers are looking for surgical fixes to anything amiss in the mirror? Our society seems blissfully unconcerned about the interior life of individuals, about what truly makes us who we are. Yet this is the chief concern of God. God is into extreme makeovers, but He tends to work from the inside out. This is the message we get from the life of the apostle John. True and lasting transformation can come only from the love of God, and He alone is qualified to perform the operation.

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.

• God Is Light. The concept of God as light may not be new to your students, but its implications will be. Because God is light, He seeks to reveal Himself to us in His perfect holiness and majesty. Light always reveals, and this is the core objective of God in sending His sinless Son to save humanity. Because John and the other disciples experienced God in all His fullness through Jesus Christ, they were transformed. Consequently, if we claim to be followers of God, then we must walk in the light, and doing so will transform us! This is the sanctifying experience that John had as he learned at the feet of Jesus. Remember, the man writing these things was once a very unloving person.

• God Is Love So We Must Love. First John 4:7-16 is perhaps the best definition of love and the demands that it makes in the lives of God’s people. Notice how John implores us to love each other. Notice how he links one’s ability to love to one’s connection with God. No God, no capacity to love. Explore with your students this link between God—who is love—and our ability to love others. The ability to love is a test of whether or not we are born of God.

• Truth Matters. The Ephesian church during the time of John was beset by false teachers, hence this admonition on which religious teachers should be welcomed into one’s home. John knew firsthand the power of the truth—he lived in close proximity to the Way, Truth, and Life. He had little tolerance for false teachers who rejected Jesus. In a time when people are willing to whitewash truth to “get along” with others, what are the implications of this message? Wouldn’t John be labeled a hatemonger today?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Romans 6; John 15:1-8; Matthew 6:43-48; John 17:3.

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. The Letters in Brief. The three Epistles of John are difficult to cover in a single lesson. First John, for instance, stresses the themes of love, light, knowledge, and life as it warns against the dangers of heresy. In each case, John recognizes God as the source of all of these noble gifts, and he does so in an effort to assure the Ephesian believers of eternal life through Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-4).

Second John is concerned with how Christian truth relates to hospitality—specifically, which religious teachers should be invited to dwell in a home and which should not. At the time, certain religious teachers were using the hospitality of church members to spread heresy. Confused believers at Ephesus needed to know how to deal with these itinerant heretics, since in the culture of the day hospitality to friends and strangers was expected.

Third John encourages the Ephesian believers to extend their hospitality to genuine teachers of truth. This letter focuses on the behavior of one Diotrephes, who refused to abide by John’s counsel and also refused to welcome traveling missionaries into his home.

2. Love on Life Support. As we read the Epistles of John, we must ask ourselves why the apostle chose love to be the overarching theme of his letters. Could there have been an absence of love? Here's what Ellen White noted about a change that took place in the church in the years following Pentecost.

“After the descent of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples went forth to proclaim a living Saviour, their one desire was the salvation of souls. They rejoiced in the sweetness of communion with saints. They were ten-

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Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Making It Stick

Making truth stick in the hearts and minds of students is a constant challenge. Have you ever noticed that you can remember music that touched you eons ago, but not the pastor’s sermon from last week? Truth set to music is often more powerful than the spoken word. Music has the capacity to engage the heart and mind at a deep level, and its message is almost impossible to resist. Perhaps this is why God told Moses to compose a special song for the Israelites to learn as they prepared to enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 31). Perhaps this is why so much of King David’s interactions with God are set to music.

Is there a song that embodies a truth in this lesson that would help that truth “stick” with your students? Why not find a meaningful song and share it with the students? Be sure to explain why you’re sharing the song and the special significance of its message.

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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.
der, thoughtful, self-denying, willing to make any sacrifice for the truth’s sake. In their daily association with one another, they revealed the love that Christ had enjoined upon them. By unselfish words and deeds they strove to kindle this love in other hearts. . . .

“But gradually a change came. The believers began to look for defects in others. Dwelling upon mistakes, giving place to unkind criticism, they lost sight of the Saviour and His love. They became more strict in regard to outward ceremonies, more particular about the theory than the practice of the faith. In their zeal to condemn others, they overlooked their own errors” (The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 547, 548).

3. The Write Time. Many scholars believe that John wrote his letters sometime between the late A.D. 80s and early 90s. In the mid A.D. 90s, John and many other believers began to suffer persecution under the reign of the emperor Domitian.

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Ask one of the students to read 1 John 3:1-3. Ask them to reread the last verse again: “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (verse 3, NKJV).

The word “pure” mentioned in verse three comes from the Greek word hagnos. This word describes a person who is clean, modest, undefiled, morally faultless, and without blemish. It describes Jesus Christ.

Ask your teens to close their eyes. Speak the

adjectives that describe the life of Jesus in their hearing. Then ask each student to think of one thing in their life that is getting in the way of their relationship with Christ, preventing God from transforming them.

Ask a student to pray, asking God to give each class member the power and willingness to surrender all to Him.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The apostle John spent a relatively short amount of time with Jesus, but that brief period of time changed his life. We know that Jesus saw something special in John because he was the disciple to whom Jesus entrusted the care of His mother (John 19:26, 27). Would Jesus have given His mother to an ambitious hothead? Probably not.

John was by no means perfect, even after time spent with Jesus, but he continued in the faith, carefully obeying the teachings of Jesus and surrendering himself to the working of the Holy Spirit in his life. The result was a stalwart exponent of the gospel who worked tirelessly to build up the fledgling Christian church at Ephesus.

John’s Epistles show us a believer who understands the practical, life-changing power of God’s love. He dares us to fall into the clutches of God’s love and continue to sin (1 John 3:4-9). He challenges us to tolerate no substitutes to Jesus Christ, no false teaching or false teachers (2 John). He commends all who stand firm for right in the face of the powerful (3 John).

Not bad for a former bad boy!

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 53, 54, 55.
love power

flashlight

“In the life of the disciple John true sanctification is exemplified. During the years of his close association with Christ, he was often warned and cautioned by the Saviour; and these reproofs he accepted. As the character of the Divine One was manifested to him, John saw his own deficiencies, and was humbled by the revelation. Day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus, and heard His lessons of humility and patience. Day by day his heart was drawn out to Christ, until he lost sight of self in love for his Master” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 557).

keytext

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! . . . Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

(1 John 3:1, 2, NIV)
Write T (True) or F (False) by the statements below with which you agree or disagree.

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

**Into the Story**

**God Is Light**

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

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”

**God Is Love, so We Must Love**

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

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

**God Is Truth**

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

(1 John 1:5-10; 4:7-16; 2 John 7-11, NIV)

**Did you know?**

Did you know that the same man who wrote the Gospel of John also authored 1, 2, and 3 John, as well as the book of Revelation? Did you know that he spent most of his life in a Greek city called Ephesus? The letters of John—especially 1 John—were written to counteract the spread of false teachings among Ephesian believers.

One of these heresies taught that a person’s inner spirit was holy and separate from their human body, which was evil. Therefore, one could do anything with their body, since the spirit could not be affected by it. This teaching gave people a license to sin. There were other heresies, but this one was especially dangerous.
punch lines

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

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

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

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NIV).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why do you think this doctrine was dangerous?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


*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 www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#URHFtrB09e. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.
PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Persecution. The very word discomforts believers of every faith, and Christians are no exception. We are not masochists. We take no special pleasure in pain, yet our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ declared: “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first” (John 15:18, NIV).

The apostle John was keenly aware that his belief in Christ put him at odds with Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. He saw believers murdered, and endured the execution of his brother James in A.D. 44. Yet John was undaunted in his love for God and the truth. His preaching and miracles aroused the ire of the Roman emperor Domitian, who first tried boiling him in a caldron of oil before exiling him on Patmos. Many years earlier he stood with his brother James assuring the Savior that he could indeed drink the cup that Jesus would drink (Matthew 20:22). At the time he had not envisioned that Jesus’ cup would cost him so much.

As is often the case, that which humanity intends for evil, God uses for His glory, and He did this when John was persecuted.

Your students need to know that persecution is not to be feared. It was in the crucible of trial, stuck on an island in the Aegean Sea, that God revealed Himself to John and gave him a revelation of Jesus Christ and the events that would usher in the end of the world and the return of the Savior. In his senior years John returned from the Isle of Patmos with his testimony sharpened, and he used his experience to continue to build up the Christian faith. He was a faithful witness until his death—of natural causes. Whether we die from persecution or not, God has promised to give us the grace needed to endure.

II. TARGET

The students will:
• Know that belief in God will always require sacrifice. (Know)
• Understand that God never calls us to endure that for which He does not prepare us. (Feel)
• Accept the challenge to live their faith in the face of trial. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

• Persecution
• Adversity/trials
• Character
• Authority/respect

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 everyday annoyances that upset many teenagers and adults today pale in comparison to the
persecution many Christians around the world are currently enduring for their belief in God. The object of this activity is to get the students talking and discussing some of the common irritants that bother them when compared with the real challenges faced by Christians in, say, China or Saudi Arabia.

After the students complete and discuss their answers, consider asking them whether or not any of the annoyances listed in the activity rise to the level of persecution. It is not uncommon to hear teens describe minor irritations in the starkest terms.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

“‘Nothing will happen to me. They know and respect me. Nobody will harm me.’ Those were the last words Pastor Kantheswar Digal spoke to his son Rajendra and his wife, Karupul.

“A Christian for more than 50 years, Pastor Digal was one of the few believers living in the small village of Sankarakhole, in Orissa state, India. He was well known by the Hindus who shared his neighborhood. Yet, his son says, the family lived there in relative peace.

“‘We had no enemies there,’ Rajendra told our VOM (Voice of the Martyrs) workers about his small hometown. ‘We could practice our faith in Christ comfortably with no problems with anybody locally.’

“Nonetheless, on Aug. 24, 2008, when Hindu radicals began violent attacks against Christians throughout Orissa, venomous threats by agitators forced the Digal family to leave their village.”

Settling in a makeshift shelter, Pastor Digal traveled back to his village to check on his home. He never made it. Several radical Hindu men dragged him from a crowded bus breaking his legs in the process. They proceeded to torture him, demanding that he return to Hinduism.

“‘I am a strong believer in Jesus Christ,’ Pastor Digal said. ‘You may kill me but I will never become Hindu.’” The men did, dumping his broken body in a creek.


II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Grizzly stories, such as the one recorded above, are becoming more and more frequent. Some believe that humans are evolving into a higher, more enlightened state, but you’d never know it from the religious hatred and bigotry engulfing our world. Religious beliefs and disputes are at the heart of most conflicts creeping up around the world today.

How do we as Christians face a tide of opposition and the specter of personal bodily injury? How should we respond? Should we “turn the other cheek” and pretend that we haven’t been hurt? How does God relate to us when we face adversity?

These are a few of the questions many Christians want answered, and this week’s lesson offers us a case study from which we can glean fear-dispelling insights.

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.

This week’s Into the Story scripture introduces us to John in one of the most challenging periods in his life. Exiled to a penal colony off in the sea, John somehow remains optimistic and upbeat. As you process the Scripture with your class, be sure to pay special attention to John’s tone. He is happy in spite of his circumstances—a “skill” that every Christian must learn.

Also, consider the role that God plays in this brief narrative. What is John saying about God? What is God saying to—and through—him? Is God willing to speak to us in our times of need, or is His voice reserved for great Christian lights such as John? God is speaking to John as though he were the only person on the planet.

Finally, John’s message brims with encouragement for God’s people down through time. What do verses 4-6 tell us about Jesus Christ? What comfort can we draw from the fact that Jesus, our conquering King, overcame the adversity and trials He faced while on earth? John’s call to exalt Jesus should be a source of great hope for us because we know that one day Jesus will return to free us from this world.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today’s story: Acts 14:22; 2 Corinthians 4:7-11; Matthew 10:16-20; Romans 8:16-18.

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. The Man Who Exiled John. His name was Titus Flavius Domitianus, born on October 24, A.D. 51. Like many other Roman emperors, Domitian was insecure, and his personal insecurities led to virulent brutality. He trusted no one, and some historians report that every room in his palace had mirrors so that he could see who was behind him at all times. In political affairs he commanded strict loyalty from the Roman senate, executing some members with whom he disagreed. He insisted on being referred to as Dominus et Deus (“Lord and God”).

Persecutions of the small Christian sect in Rome began under the emperor Nero in A.D. 64. After a fire consumed nearly three quarters of Rome, Nero deflected attention from those who suspected that he started the fire for his amusement by rounding up Christians, torturing them until they implicated others, then putting scores of them to death in the most horrific ways imaginable. This persecution killed the apostle Paul, and two decades later the emperor Domitian attempted to kill another powerful witness—John. Most scholars believe that it was during the reign of Domitian—A.D. 85-96—that John wrote the book of Revelation from the visions given him by God.

2. Before the Emperor. Ellen White sets the scene of John’s trial before the emperor. “John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Here before the authorities the apostle’s doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. By these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple’s death.

“But John answered for himself in a clear and convincing manner, and with such simplicity and candor...”

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Tips for Top-notch Teaching

Keep It Simple

In a Sabbath School lesson such as this one there are many points that can be made, but you’ll certainly not have enough time for all of them. One of the teaching secrets that made Jesus effective was His simplicity. Jesus knew ordinary people—how they talked, how they thought, etc.—because He studied people, and because He came in contact with them in His father’s carpenter shop. Jesus made sure that everything He taught was applicable to some real-life challenge that His students were facing or would face. He spoke in simple language, using everyday “props” to make His points.

Jesus’ hearers often missed the deeper layers of meaning in His teachings, but they left with more than enough to pique their interest. As you teach this week’s lesson, consider what items from the teens’ world you can use to build modern-day parables around the truths in this lesson. What language would make the message most simple? Ask God to give you the gift of simplicity that Jesus had when He taught.

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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.
that his words had a powerful effect. His hearers were astonished at his wisdom and eloquence. But the
more convincing his testimony, the deeper was the hatred of his opposers. The emperor Domitian was
filled with rage. He could neither dispute the reasoning of Christ’s faithful advocate, nor match the power that
attended his utterance of truth; yet he determined that he would silence his voice.

“John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil; but the
Lord preserved the life of His faithful servant, even as
He preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace”

God’s servant did not wilt under the pressure of
the Roman emperor. John never recanted his faith, and
the testimony coming from the caldron of burning oil
cut the Roman emperor to the quick. He removed
John and later sent him to Patmos. If God can protect
His servant under such dire circumstances, can He not
do the same for us?

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Ask the class to form a circle and hold hands. Tell
the class that you are going to call out some situa-
tions, and that you want each class member to pray
for the person on their right and left as if the situation
you call out is true for the people whose hands they
are holding.

Say: What would you tell God if you were holding
the hand of:

A. Someone who is afraid of the time of trouble
   and the end of the world?

B. Someone who loves God, but isn’t sure of
   whether or not they would be true to God under
   trial and adversity?

C. Someone who is struggling to live for Jesus in
   their school?

Close with a prayer asking God to give us the
strength to be faithful to Him!

(Source: www.creativeteachingideas.com/blog/creative_
   teaching_ideas/adventure_prayer.html#more)

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

This week’s lesson reminds us that Christians
aren’t made overnight. Trials are one of God’s
appointed means of perfecting our characters and
drawing us closer to Him. John learned this several
times throughout his life.

His brother James was beheaded in A.D. 44. Philip
was scourged in Phrygia, thrown into prison, and later
crucified in A.D. 54. Matthew was killed with a halberd
in A.D. 60. James the Less, the brother of Jesus and
writer of the book of James, was stoned to death at
the age of 94 by Jews. And the list goes on and on.

John knew that there would be attempts on his
life, yet he remained faithful to God. How can we stand
strong in the face of adversity? John’s life tells us how:
John gave his life to Jesus and he esteemed the sac-
rifice of God to be so precious that it was an honor for
him to share the fellowship of Christ’s suffering. We are
not to worry about whether or not we’ll be able to
stand in a similar trial. Our only responsibility is to be
faithful to God each day and trust Him to supply our
every need in the hour of trial.

Furthermore, if we remain faithful we too, like
John, will see fresh revelations of Jesus Christ.

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 56.
The rulers of the Jews were filled with bitter hatred against John for his unwavering fidelity to the cause of Christ. They declared that their efforts against the Christians would avail nothing so long as John’s testimony kept ringing in the ears of the people. In order that the miracles and teachings of Jesus might be forgotten, the voice of the bold witness must be silenced. John was accordingly summoned to Rome to be tried for his faith. Here before the authorities the apostle’s doctrines were misstated. False witnesses accused him of teaching seditious heresies. By these accusations his enemies hoped to bring about the disciple’s death” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 569).
Rank the following items on a scale of 1 (highly upsetting) to 10 (no sweat) based on how much they annoy you.

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

**Into the Story**

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Relation 1:1-11, NIV)

**Did you know?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


“Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors.”—Anonymous.
Sabbath

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

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

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

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

Sunday

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

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

Did you notice that John’s troubles have been forgotten as he looks upon God and the vision? What does this teach you about how to respond to trials and adversity?

Monday

This week’s *Key Text* makes it clear that John knew exactly why he had been imprisoned. He preached God’s Word and he shared his testimony that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah.

What phrase in Revelation 1:9 tells us how John is undergoing this test of his faith?

Now read Revelation 14:9-12. This verse refers to Christ’s followers who will be living right before Jesus’ second coming. How will they handle the adversity of the times?

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

Tuesday

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

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

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

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

Wednesday

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

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

Thursday

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

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

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

Friday

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

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

*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 www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books.4By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.

this week’s reading*


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PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

With the scope of this lesson being the book of Revelation, it’s absurd to try to thoroughly cover every verse and nuance of the text. You will need to choose what passage merits your attention for teaching. Suggested topics include the gift of prophecy, the church, and the remnant and its mission. Regardless of what direction you go, your presentation should be centered on Christ. After all, it was the revelation of Jesus that John wrote about on the island of Patmos.

The lesson helps will be weighted toward the theme of the remnant and its mission. Should you pursue this topic, it is important to emphasize that God has always had a remnant people. For example, Noah and his family survived the Flood and saved the human race from extinction. The exiles who returned to Jerusalem following their Babylonian captivity were the remnant who restored the Jewish race.

Like the remnant of today, the remnant in Old Testament times were devoted followers of God. They were people who refused to compromise with the majority. For example, while most of the Israelites parted with the world, there always remained a faithful remnant that followed God. They became heirs to the rights and privileges promised to Abraham.

When the Israelites rejected Jesus as the Messiah, God rejected them as His remnant nation and transferred the promises and privileges of His remnant followers to the Christian church.

This lesson offers you the opportunity to challenge the young people in your class to align themselves with God’s remnant followers in the last days of this earth’s history. In the book of Revelation these sold-out disciples of Jesus at the end of time will have two identifying characteristics: (1) they will keep the commandments of God; (2) they will have the testimony of Jesus (see Revelation 12:17; 19:10; 14; 18:1-4; etc.).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Study the concept of the remnant, which is a theme throughout Scripture. (Know)
- Sense the heart of Christ for His bride, the church in the last days. (Feel)
- Have an opportunity to get involved in the mission of God’s remnant people. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE

- The gift of prophecy
- Jesus
- The church
- The remnant and its mission

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, break the class into small groups and assign a different question for each group to discuss. After the discussion, have each group share their question and their conclusion.

- Can we face the end-times with peaceful certainty, knowing we are part of God’s remnant?
- Why has God chosen to reveal His character through the remnant?
- What are the identifying marks of the remnant in the last days?
- Why is a biblical understanding of the remnant important in the last days?
- What is the connection between Jesus and the book of Revelation? What is the relationship between Jesus and the remnant?
- Will the final remnant be comprised of followers from every faith and denomination?
- Does belonging to the remnant carry with it additional responsibilities? If so, in what way?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Illustration

Share the illustration in your own words.

A patient in the Kennestone Regional Hospital knocked over a cup of water, spilling it on the floor beside his bed. The patient was afraid he might slip on the water when getting out of bed, so he asked a nurse’s aide to mop it up. Unbeknownst to the patient, however, the hospital policy said that small spills were the responsibility of the nurse’s aides while large spills were to be mopped up by the hospital’s housekeeping group.

The nurse’s aide deemed the spill to be a large one. Consequently, she called the housekeeping department. When the housekeeper arrived she declared, “I can’t clean that up, it’s a small spill. Our department does only large spills.”

“In a pig’s eye,” the aide barked. “It’s not my responsibility because it’s a large puddle.”

The housekeeper disagreed. “Well, it’s not mine,” she said, “the puddle is too small.” Back and forth they fired potshots.

The exasperated patient listened for a time, then took a pitcher of water from his night table and emptied it on the floor. “There,” he said, “is that a big enough puddle now for you two to decide?”

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words.

Have you ever noticed how often people try to shirk responsibility? This happens not only in the workplace, but in the church as well. The fact is we all have a responsibility in God’s family. When every person in the church responds to God’s call for action, Ellen White’s prophecy of the last days will be fulfilled. She wrote: “I have been deeply impressed by scenes that have recently passed before me in the night season. There seemed to be a great movement—a work of revival—going forward in many places. Our people were moving into line, responding to God’s call. My brethren, the Lord is speaking to us. Shall we not heed His voice? Shall we not trim our lamps, and act like men who look for their Lord to come? The time is one that calls for light-bearing, for action.”

Out of the Story for Teachers

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

The Remnant and Its Mission

- What does being a part of God’s remnant in the last days mean to you?
- Have you ever felt like an outsider? Explain.
- If grace is what defines the parameters of the remnant, then what do you suggest is the source of the insider/outsider mentality that some people have when it comes to this idea of God’s remnant people?
- The criterion that defines the remnant in the end of time is marked in Revelation. They “keep the commandments of God, and [have] the faith of Jesus.” From your perspective can this be used as a characteristic of a denomination? Why or why not?

The Three Angels’ Messages

- How do you think most people feel about the idea of an imminent judgment day? Are most people filled with fear or hope? How would you compare your feelings about the judgment with others? How do you reconcile God’s grace with His judgment?
- Babylon’s sin is self-sufficiency. In what ways are people tempted to be self-sufficient today?
- Rank the three angels’ messages in Revelation 14 from the one you feel our church is most effectively sharing with the world to the one that we are least effectively sharing. Explain.
The Centrality of Jesus in Revelation

Note that this study is about “The revelation from Jesus Christ” so that we can know “what must soon take place” (Revelation 1:1, NIV).

- Do you ever feel afraid when thinking about the last days? Why or why not?
- In the first nine verses of Revelation John mentions “the testimony of Jesus” twice. Why is this significant? What does he imply about the nature of God’s revelation?

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 remnant theme moves through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. In the Old Testament six different Hebrew roots form many different words that are used hundreds of times in all sorts of contexts.

The remnant is first used in Scripture in the context of Noah’s story. Genesis 7:23 records: “Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark” (NIV). The phrase “was left” comes from the Hebrew root sha’ar meaning “to remain,” or “to be left over.” This is the most commonly used root for the remnant. After the Flood, Noah and his family were the only ones remaining, i.e., the remnant.

Note that being associated with the remnant is a choice. Being part of the remnant did not happen through inheritance or by marriage. Noah and his family all had to choose to get on the boat. Following the Flood, most of Noah’s descendants chose to ditch the remnant. They rejected God’s covenant and began construction on the tower of Babel. They did not believe God’s promise (symbolized by a rainbow) to refrain from flooding the earth again.

With Abraham a new remnant was formed. He maintained a saving relationship with the Lord in a world that didn’t. He reestablished a family remnant that would preserve the worship of Yahweh and remain faithful to the covenant conditions. The remnant language then weaves through the stories of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and the children of Israel. Throughout the Old Testament God promises to preserve His remnant. One of many examples comes from Isaiah 11:11 which says: “In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people” (NIV).

The Lord was faithful to His promises. He brought back a remnant of believers to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and rebuild the nation. But this nation became so obsessed with the law that the law became their religion. While Israel had the commandments, it rejected the Commandment-Giver; it was so caught up in preserving truth that it crucified the One who said “I am the . . . truth.” Consequently, the church became the new Israel, that is, the new remnant.

As you would expect, then, the remnant theme continues through the New Testament church. 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.
III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with a pop quiz and then challenge the students to make a commitment to be a part of God’s remnant people. True or False?

- God has always had a remnant of faithful followers. (True)
- The remnant will be comprised only of people who have lived perfect lives. (False)
- In the last days, God’s remnant people are described as commandment keepers and believers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. (True)
- God is calling us to be a part of His remnant today. (True)
- God’s remnant people are saved only by grace. (True)

Summary

Share the following case study and discuss it with your students.

Jolene has made a commitment to be a part of her church youth group. Sometimes the group’s functions interfere with her social life—like tonight. There is a group planning meeting, but Jolene wants to go to her boyfriend’s baseball game. He is playing and he gets upset when Jolene doesn’t watch him play.

What would you do in Jolene’s situation?
What should you do in Jolene’s situation?
What would Jesus do in Jolene’s situation?
What commitments are most important to keep?
What kinds of conflicting commitments are we likely to face in the last days? How can we remain loyal to God? Would you agree that the distinguishing mark of the remnant church is an uncompromising commitment to God and God alone? Why or why not?

1Fundamental Belief No. 18.
2Fundamental Belief No. 12.
3Fundamental Belief No. 13.

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 57.
forever faithful

composite

flashlight

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

keytext

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

(Revelation 1:3, NIV)
Either/Or

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

**Into the Story**

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

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

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

“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.”

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

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

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

“At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus."

**Did you know?**

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

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

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Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.”

(Relation 1:1-3, 8-11; 12:17; 14:6-12; 19:10, NIV)

**Punch Lines**

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

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

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

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

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

**Out of the Story**

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

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

Questions to consider:

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

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

• How do these messages affect how we live?

• What would my life look like if I were to apply these messages to my life?

**Other Eyes**

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

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

“Jesus is the one who never changes in a universe that always does. Jesus is Creator, Sustainer, Saviour, Friend, God’s Son, and God Himself!”—Taken from www.adventist.org/beliefs/index.html.
**Sabbath**

Review the What Do You Think? section. Notice how the Either/Or statements are based on major themes from the book of Revelation. Next to each of these themes listed below, write a few words that summarize what you believe the book of Revelation teaches on each theme.

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

**Sunday**

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

Now read the passage, inserting your answers where indicated.

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

This dragon was _______ (7). I mean really, really ticked-off _______ (8) at a woman. The woman represents _______ (9). This _______ (10) dragon, of course, represents _______ (11). _______ (11) went off to make war against _______ (9)—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17, MLT [Mad Lib Translation]).

**Monday**

Read the Key Text then explain the difference between reading the words of prophecy, hearing the words, and taking the words to heart.

Reading: ____________________________
Hearing: ____________________________
Taking to heart: ____________________________

**Tuesday**

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

What do you think Ellen White meant when she said it is possible to experience a “foretaste of heavenly things”?

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

**Wednesday**

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

**Thursday**

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

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

**Friday**

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

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

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

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**this week’s reading**

The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapter 57.

go out like a light

SCRIPTURE STORY: Matthew 16:18; Revelation 7:9-17; Ephesians 2:19-22.
KEY TEXT: Ephesians 2:19-22.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS
This final chapter in The Acts of the Apostles offers an inspiring call to carry on the legacy of spiritual heroes. Ellen White writes:

“The enemy of righteousness left nothing undone in his effort to stop the work committed to the Lord’s builders. But God ‘left not himself without witness.’ Acts 14:17. Workers were raised up who ably defended the faith once delivered to the saints. History bears record to the fortitude and heroism of these men. Like the apostles, many of them fell at their post, but the building of the temple went steadily forward. The workmen were slain, but the work advanced. The Waldenses, John Wycliffe, Huss and Jerome, Martin Luther and Zwingli, Cranmer, Latimer, and Knox, the Huguenots, John and Charles Wesley, and a host of others brought to the foundation material that will endure throughout eternity” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 598).

This lesson provides an ideal chance to challenge your youth group to give their lives for a cause that will endure throughout eternity. Use this opportunity to inspire the young people to leverage their lives and employ their spiritual gifts to build the kingdom of God.

Regardless of temperament, every person in your youth group is called to be a witness. God wants every one to be active in evangelism—regardless of someone’s personality type. Thus, the primary objective of this lesson is to help erase stereotypes we might have of evangelists and inspire every student to be an ambassador for Jesus.

II. TARGET
The students will:
• Consider the wide scope of evangelism. (Know)
• Sense the heart of Christ for His wayward children. (Feel)
• Be challenged to get involved in building the kingdom of God. (Respond)

III. EXPLORE
• Great controversy
• Witnessing/sharing faith
• Evangelism
• 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.

As an alternate activity, read Matthew 5:14-16. Unpack the passage with your students by listing their answers on a whiteboard.
• What are some examples of light that glares? Share some negative illustrations of light that can be blinding and destructive.
• What are some examples of light that glows? Share some positive illustrations of light that can
be glowing and productive.
• Now think about the statement of Jesus: “You are the light of the world.” Can you think of examples in which that “light” has been glaring and overwhelming, i.e., damaging to the work of God? Can you think of examples in which that light has been glowing, i.e., a warm and inviting light for God’s kingdom? How can we be God’s witnesses without turning people off or offending them?

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Illustration

Charlie Peacock, in his book A New Way of Being Human, shares the following story:

At 4 p.m. on May 27, 1992, in the war-torn city of Sarajevo, people hungry for bread lined up outside a bakery. Without warning, a bomb fell and split the line into pieces, killing 22 people. Not far from the scene lived a musician named Vedran Smailovic. Before the weight of the war crushed Sarajevo’s music, Smailovic had been the principal cellist with the opera. At his wit’s end and sickened by the slaughter, Smailovic made a choice that day. He decided to breathe life into the rubble of war.

Every day thereafter, at 4 p.m. precisely, [he] put on his full, formal concert attire, took up his cello, and walked out of his apartment into the midst of the battle raging around him. He placed a little camp stool in the middle of the crater that the shell had made, and he played a concert. He played to the abandoned streets, to the smashed trucks and burning buildings, and to the terrified people who hid in the cellars while the bombs dropped and the bullets flew. Day after day, he made his unimaginably courageous stand for human dignity, for all those lost to war, for civilization, for compassion, and for peace.

Folk singer Joan Baez said of Smailovic, “His playing celebrated the marvel of survival and mourned the madness of death.”

Once a CNN reporter asked if he was not crazy for playing his cello while Sarajevo was being shelled. Smailovic answered, “You ask me am I crazy for playing the cello, why do you not ask if they are not crazy for shelling Sarajevo?”

Robert Fulghum wonders, “Is this man crazy? Maybe. Is his gesture futile? Yes, in a conventional sense, yes, of course. But what can a cellist do? All he knows how to do. Speaking softly with his cello, one note at a time, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, calling out the rats that infest the human spirit.”

Bridge to the Story

In our dark world that’s scarred with terrorism, date rape, cancer, divorce, alcoholism, child abuse, and every conceivable kind of hate, God calls you to be a light.

What can you do? Consider Fulghum’s answer: “All that you know how to do.” Perhaps you can play your cello at the retirement home. Or serve soup at the homeless shelter. Or mix cement for Habitat for Humanity. In whatever way that God has wired you, leverage your gifts to build His kingdom.

That’s what Vedran Smailovic did. Two years later, at the Royal Conservatory Concert Hall in Manchester, England, the legendary cellist Yo-Yo Ma performed David Wise’s composition, “The Cellist of Sarajevo.” Smailovic was there to hear it.

Out of the Story for Teachers

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

Matthew 16:18

• How do you interpret the power given to Peter by Jesus?
• As you look at the church today, do you believe Jesus’ prophecy that “the gates of hell will not prevail against it” is being fulfilled? Why or why not?
• The rock on which the church of Jesus is built has been identified as: (1) Jesus Christ and His work of salvation at Calvary; (2) Peter (the first leader at the church in Jerusalem); (3) the confession of faith that Peter gave and that all subsequent followers would give. Read 1 Peter 2:4-6 and Ephesians 2:19-22 and then explain which possible interpretation seems most plausible to you.

Ephesians 2:19-22

• Based solely on this text, how would you define the church?
• How does this text inform a Christ-follower’s understanding of evangelism?
• What part does the individual play in the process of “being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”?

Revelation 7:9-17

• What does this passage say about God’s kingdom? Why do you think Ellen White chose this passage as one of those to conclude her book
The Acts of the Apostles?
• “The great tribulation” has been explained to mean the suffering of believers through the ages; another explanation posits that it refers to a specific time of intense tribulation yet to come. Which interpretation do you believe is correct? Or could both explanations contain some truth? Explain.

Sharing Context and Background
Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.
Why is it that 93 percent of Americans claim to believe in God but only 40 percent of Americans attend church? Many people love God; they just can’t stand the church!
Now contrast the church today with the early Christian church.
Given the explosive, exponential growth of the early Christian church, it is no surprise that Acts 2:47 says that “People in general liked what they saw” (Message). So what was it that nonbelievers saw in the church that they liked so much?
This growth makes sense when you consider the culture of the ancient world and how countercultural the church was in contrast. The church was unlike anything people had ever seen, and consequently people flooded into it to be a part of this radical new institution.

1. The hierarchical culture
First, the Roman culture was very hierarchical in ancient times. People were rigidly divided into classes. There was the Roman senate at the very top, then the equestrian class, then several other class distinctions until you got to the bottom of the ladder with slaves. Everything in the culture reinforced this caste system, and it was virtually impossible to improve your standing in life.

Then a new community emerged in which people followed the teaching of the Rabbi Jesus who destroyed the social ladder. He taught that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45, NKJV). The world had never seen anything like this.

2. The culture of gender discrimination
Furthermore, blatant discrimination against women was very common in the ancient world. John Ortberg points out that “the practice of just abandoning [baby girls] until they would die outside somewhere was legal, morally accepted, widely practiced by all social classes in the Greco-Roman world.”5 But Jesus included women in His inner circle of friends. And His followers believed that “there is neither . . . male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28, NIV).

3. The culture of marginalizing the poor and the sick
Finally, the ancient world was a cruel place for the sick—but not in the church. Normally, sick people were cast off and left to die. But Jesus and His followers embraced the outcasts—even lepers (see Matthew 8:2, 3). There had never been a community like this.

Now is it any wonder that slaves, women, the sick, the poor, and the disenfranchised all flocked to this new community called the church? If the church served others in the same way today as it did in the first century, do you suppose it would see the same growth? Why or why not?

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**

**Making It Practical**

Good teaching *always* helps students to apply the concepts from the classroom in the real world. So be sure to make your teaching practical by helping students get a clear picture of how they can take the ideas of this lesson and apply them. For example, for this teaching you may brainstorm specific ways that your students can be the light of the world. Your list may look something like this:

1. Type out a prayer for a friend and e-mail it to them.
2. Post a Bible promise on your friend’s locker.
3. Call a friend that you know is going through a hard time and just listen.
4. Bake some cookies for your neighbors.
5. Organize a singing band to visit a nursing home.
6. Pick up litter in the slums.
7. Collect canned food for a local food bank.

**III. CLOSING**

**Activity**

*Close by introducing your young people to Joe Sixpack.*

Meet Joe Sixpack. He lives across the street from you. He attends the local high school and plays on their football team. He chews tobacco. He dates a girl who sports a tattoo on her ankle. Joe loves Big Macs, Dizzee Rascal, and fast cars. Joe’s parents divorced when he was 6. Now, he lives with his mom and stepdad.

Joe’s stepdad attends the local Catholic church, but Joe doesn’t get to church except for Christmas and Easter. He believes in God, but sees church as irrelevant and boring. In Joe’s mind, as long as we do good things, we don’t have to belong to an organized religion. That’s why Joe volunteers at the local homeless shelter. He figures the best kind of religion is the type that meets needs, not the kind that sits around in funny-looking buildings.

**Summary**

*After describing Joe Sixpack above, discuss the following questions:*  
1. Do you know anybody who reminds you of Joe?  
2. Is it important to build friendships with non-Adventists like Joe? Do such friendships compromise or strengthen your faith?  
3. Are Joe’s opinions about God and church valid? Why or why not?  
4. What would attract Joe to our church?  
5. Would Jesus have us reach Joe? How?  

After discussing these questions (and some you may wish to add), develop a master plan for reaching Joe Sixpack. You may wish to have a Friend Day on which you can invite an unchurched buddy to your Sabbath School. You may wish to plan a program designed to speak Joe’s language. For example, you could invite a professional to speak, or host a Christmas party, or have a ski day. Whatever you do, don’t ignore Joe. Joe matters to God.

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3. Ibid.


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 58.
flashlight

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

keytext

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

(Ephesians 2:19-22, NKJV)
Write down every adjective that first comes to mind when you hear the word “evangelist”:

Write down every evangelist that comes to mind:

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

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

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

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

“I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’

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

(Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 7:9-17, NIV)
“You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16, Message).

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

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

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

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

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

“When I fancied that I stood alone, I was really in the ridiculous position of being backed up by all of Christendom.” —G. K. Chesterton, early 20th-century English author.
Sabbath
Review your ideas about evangelists in the What Do You Think? section. Who came to mind? Did you think of a Bible-thumping man in a white suit who preaches with a southern accent? Or did you think of a mild-mannered statesman like Billy Graham or Ken Cox? Perhaps you envisioned a fire-faced street preacher with an accept-Jesus-right-now-or-I’ll-beat-ya-black-n-blue attitude.

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

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

Sunday
Take the following quiz to determine your evangelistic style.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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**some content has been abstracted for brevity.**