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CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

1ST QUARTER 2026



Going the **Distance**

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Youth Sabbath School Bible Study Guide

cornerstone connections

REAL. SOLID. STORIES.

1st Quarter 2026
Going the Distance

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a word about what's ahead...

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

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

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

The word from God comes to us in the **stories** of people who encountered Him and made a decision to either follow Him or walk away.

Real. Solid. Stories. You will find one in *Into the Story* in each lesson. *Out of the Story* will provide you with ways to search for truth you can apply to your life. In each lesson you will also find:

- **What Do You Think?**—a mental activity to get your mind and heart in gear for the story to follow. Every time you approach a Bible story, you are coming to it in the context of the story in which you live every day.
- **Did You Know?**—a brief statistic or definition that digs a little deeper into the story or simply provides some helpful facts to bring to the lesson.
- **Key Text**—a verse that points out a key concept from the story. It is also a great place to find verses that you can memorize and store away for later use.
- **Punch Lines**—a few other verses from Scripture that punctuate key concepts of the lesson. You may see connections between them and the Bible story as well as your own life.
- **Flashlight**—a brief snapshot of Ellen White's input on the story. These glimmers that shed light onto the biblical passage will also give you a glimpse of what awaits you in the suggested weekly reading from her inspired commentary on the stories—the Conflict of the Ages.*
- **Further Insight**—one or two quotes that will provide further insight into the central message of the lesson.
- **Connecting to Life**—the guide to making the truths about God in this story your very own. Study the Bible lesson during the week in preparation for Sabbath School. On Sabbath you will have the opportunity to review, discuss, and elaborate on what you learned with your teacher and other students in your Sabbath School class. Each day of the week you will be directed to explore one of the sections of the lesson, to relate it to the story you live, and to make the message from God apply to you personally.

Welcome to *Cornerstone Connections*.

—General Conference Sabbath School Department

PS: Don't forget to check out the reading plan.

* A special modern adaptation has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press Publishing Association. To access this book in an e-format, go to www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

1ST QUARTER 2026

January

3—Last Words and Witnesses [p. 5]

The last words a person speaks are usually of utmost importance—especially if they *know* they're the last words they will speak. Christ's last words were no different.

10—The Promised Gift [p. 9]

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

17—Reflecting Jesus [p. 13]

It was evident when talking with Peter and John that they had spent time with Jesus. Can people say that about us?

24—Truth and You [p. 17]

God calls us to radical authenticity and uncompromising character. Unfortunately, Ananias and Sapphira didn't heed the call.

31—Power. Perseverance. Purpose. [p. 21]

Whether as a religious leader or a teenager, we are empowered by God not only to overcome tribulation but also to develop our giftedness to be used for His glory.

February

7—The First Christian Martyr [p. 25]

Stephen was brought to court on trumped-up charges, permitted a brief defense, and then executed. Serving God exacted a price then—and it does now.

14—Go the Distance [p. 29]

Saul's work of destruction was so thorough that Jesus had to arrest him, change his name, and set him on a different road—a road with a purpose.

21—Evidence of Conversion [p. 33]

As demonstrated in Peter's life, Jesus isn't looking for perfect people to follow Him. He's looking for real people who can be changed by His love.

28—The Epicenter for Missions [p. 37]

Antioch was the crossroads of the Roman Empire from which God launched His people full throttle into missionary work. But it doesn't stop there.

March

7—Us and Them [p. 41]

Tensions arose between the Gentile and Jewish believers. But through sharing stories of how God was working among them, they rekindled the heart of their mission to the world.

14—Faith Works [p. 45]

Merely believing in the "right" things isn't enough in this world. We must be firmly grounded in God's Word in order to make right choices.

21—Hope Against Hope [p. 49]

When we have heard the good news repeatedly, the effect seems to wear off. But where would we be without hope?

28—The Inspiring Minority [p. 53]

Paul made some enemies by his preaching—he cut into the sale of idols. But God never said that standing for the right would make us popular.

Going the Distance

FIRST QUARTER 2026



Youth Sabbath School
Bible Study Guide





CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 03 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 1:1-11.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 1-3.

last words and witnesses



Photo by Alden Ho

flashlight

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9).

key text

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

(Acts 1:7, 8, NIV)

what do you think?

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

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

Why did you rank the above this way?

did you know?

Did you know that there are 7,360 languages spoken in the world today? Furthermore, one in five people are still waiting for the Bible in their own language. One hundred sixty-seven million people, speaking 2,014 languages, are still waiting for translation to begin.

Accessed from <https://www.wycliffe.org.uk/about/our-impact/>, January 20, 2021.



INTO THE STORY

"In my former book,

Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

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

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

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

"They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

"Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

(Acts 1:1-14, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the story and *underline* what you think are the three most important sections of this story. Why?

Who is this person named Theophilus that the book of Acts is addressed to? How does Luke describe his approach to writing the story of the New Testament church?

This story contains the final words Christ spoke directly to the disciples before ascending to heaven. Compare these words with His final words in Matthew 28:19, 20. What are the similarities? differences?

Why do you think the disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem for "the promised gift"? What is this gift and what did the disciples know about how they were to function without Christ physically there with them?

How would you describe/define someone who is a "witness," and what were they to bear witness to?

Why do you think they were to start first in Jerusalem? How is Jerusalem different from Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth?

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"In every age the Lord has had His watchmen, who have borne a faithful testimony to the generation in which they lived." —Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 11

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Matthew 28:19, 20.

Read and respond to the ranking exercise in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson. What do you see as the greatest mission field to witness to?

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

Sunday

Read Mark 5:18-20.

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

Monday

Read Acts 1:7, 8.

The Key Text to memorize this week declares God's plan to communicate His story to the world. Imagine the challenges that faced the disciples as they thought about being witnesses in Jerusalem. What would that cost them? The chief priests and

general prejudice against Christ were still very strong. The next phase would be taking the gospel to Judea and Samaria. Already their perceptions of Samaritans were hateful. Who would listen? Why should they care? And how would they be able to take this news about Christ to the ends of the earth? Think about what these three phases of ministry look like today in your world. What phase would you say seems to be the most challenging? Why?

Tuesday

Read Isaiah 43:10-12.

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

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Read 1 John 1:5.

This week's lesson is about being ready to bear witness to the risen Christ. Being ready to share what Christ means to you is a practical way to be prepared for any opportunity.

Your testimony might follow three simple questions: (1) How did you come to know and trust Christ as your personal Savior? (2) Why do you think everyone should choose to become a follower of Christ? (3) What difference does Christ make in your life today? It is important to choose passages of Scripture that support your answers as well. Keep a copy of your testimony in your Bible, and be ready to share it with someone when the opportunity arises.

Friday

Read Romans 1:16.

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

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 1-3.

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#URhf1rBO9s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 10 2026

the promised gift

Scripture Story: Acts 2:1-39.

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



Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

"It is not a conclusive evidence that a man is a Christian because he manifests spiritual ecstasy under extraordinary circumstances. Holiness is not rapture: it is an entire surrender of the will to God; it is living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God; it is doing the will of our heavenly Father; it is trusting God in trial, in darkness as well as in the light; it is walking by faith and not by sight; it is relying on God with unquestioning confidence, and resting in His love" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 51).

key text

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

(Acts 2:2-4, NIV)

what do you think?

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

1. He said if we know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will God be willing to give us the Holy Spirit. How do you feel about this?
2. What does the Holy Spirit give you that you should care about?
3. What does the Holy Spirit have to offer to a teenager?
4. Why should you want the Holy Spirit?

did you know?

The same power that sustained the patriarchs, that gave Caleb and Joshua faith and courage, and that made the work of the apostolic church effective, has upheld God's faithful children in every succeeding age. It was through the power of the Holy Spirit that during the Dark Ages the Waldensian Christians helped to prepare the way for the Reformation. It was the same power that made successful the efforts of the noble men and women who pioneered the way for the establishment of modern missions and for the translation of the Bible into the languages and dialects of all nations and peoples. "And today God is still using His church to make known His purpose in the earth."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 53.



INTO THE STORY

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

"Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians,

Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Capadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?'

"Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'

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

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

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

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

OUT OF THE STORY

What did the Holy Spirit do for the disciples?

How did the people respond to Peter's sermon?

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

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

If you had been a witness of this event, how would you have reacted?

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

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 49

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Romans 5:5.

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

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

Many people long for a loving, lasting relationship here on earth. We know that we can have that kind of relationship with God, but it doesn't take away our human need for companionship. When the Holy Spirit fills us with God's love, we are able to love others and experience healthier, closer, less selfish relationships. How can doing it God's way give us happiness that will last for the rest of our lives?

Sunday

Read Acts 2:14-21.

When God poured out the Holy Spirit, His people began to do amazing things! Those who saw them reacted in some very different ways. Some were shocked, and others mocked, "They're drunk!" People often make fun of things they don't understand. Have you ever been made fun of for being different? What should be your response as a Christian? See Peter's answer in today's reading.

Monday

Read Acts 2:2-4.

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

blessing to others and bless us too! What are your deepest desires? Are you ready to see what God has been saving for you?

Thursday

Read Psalm 139:7-10.

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

Friday

Read Matthew 3:11.

After studying this week, how can you see the Holy Spirit working in your life? What more would you like to be able to do with His help? Your peace and your joy are a great witness of what God does for you. Are you brave enough to ask God for His Spirit and watch to see what amazing things He has in store? How can you be an example of an awesome experience with God to the people around you?

Wednesday

Read 1 Corinthians 6:19.

God has promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit. He gives us gifts that will fulfill our deepest desires and bring us lasting happiness. God knows them. God created you with particular needs, and He wants you to turn to Him to meet those needs. When God promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit, we should know that the Holy Spirit will both make us a

this week's reading*

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

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#URlhF1rB09s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 17 2026

reflecting Jesus

Scripture Story: Acts 3; Acts 4:1-31.

Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 6.



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flashlight

"After the Savior's ascension, the sense of the divine presence, full of love and light, was still with them. It was a personal presence. Jesus, the Savior, who had walked and talked and prayed with them, who had spoken hope and comfort to their hearts, had, while the message of peace was upon His lips, been taken from them into heaven. As the chariot of angels received Him, His words had come to them, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end.' Matthew 28:20. . . . Their union with Him was stronger now than when He was with them in person. The light and love and power of an indwelling Christ shone out through them, so that men, beholding, marveled" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 65).

keytext

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

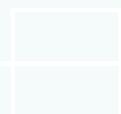
(Acts 4:13, NKJV)

did you know?

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

"Of the disciples after the transfiguration of Christ it is written that at the close of that wonderful scene 'they saw no man, save Jesus only.'

Matthew 17:8. 'Jesus only'—in these words is contained the secret of the life and power that marked the history of the early church. When the disciples first heard the words of Christ, they felt their need of Him. They sought, they found, they followed Him" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 64).



what do you think?

Number the following methods of sharing Christ from least effective (1) to most effective (10).

- Preaching on a busy street corner
- Going door to door with a survey about spiritual matters
- Inviting a friend to church
- Living a good life through example
- Going on a mission trip
- Wearing clothes that display a Christian message
- Bringing a friend to church
- Giving a speech in class about my faith
- Hanging out with friends who are spiritual
- Handing out gospel pamphlets

INTO THE STORY

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

"Then Peter said, 'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.' Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into

the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."

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

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

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

(Acts 3:1-10; Acts 4:5-13, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the passages in the Into the Story section and answer the following questions:

Acts 3:1-10

When is the last time you jumped for joy, praising God? What happened?

Why do you think Peter emphasized that the man was healed in the "name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"?

What kind of witness do you suppose this crippled man was for Jesus? Is your testimony about what Jesus has done in your life just as powerful? Why or why not?

Acts 4:5-13

Review the roles that the priests, the captain of the Temple, the Sadducees, and the Sanhedrin played before in the story of Jesus (see Luke 22:1-6, 47-71; John 18). Why would this healing disturb them?

Compare the question in verse 7 to the question asked in Luke 20:2. Why is this an important question to the Jewish leaders?

In what way does Peter's answer fulfill Jesus' words in Luke 21:12-15?

Write a paraphrase of Acts 4:13.

punch lines

"**You are my witnesses,**" declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he'" (**Isaiah 43:10, NIV**).

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

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

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

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

further insight

"The disciples of Christ had a deep sense of their own inefficiency, and with humiliation and prayer they joined their weakness to His strength, their ignorance to His wisdom, their unworthiness to His righteousness, their poverty to His exhaustless wealth. Thus strengthened and equipped, they hesitated not to press forward in the service of the Master."

— Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 57

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Isaiah 43:10.

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

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

Sunday

Read Mark 1:17.

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

"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you."

- Do you find it easier to offer God money or yourself? Why?
- What is it that you can offer to friends who may be spiritually crippled?
- Would Peter's witness have been as effective without this healing? Explain. In what ways can serving others enhance evangelism today?

"They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

- Who comes to mind when you think of someone who spends a lot of time with Jesus?
- Ask yourself: How does spending time with Jesus change me?
- True or false: If you spend time with Jesus you can't help witnessing to others. Explain your answer.

Monday

Read Acts 4:13.

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

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

Tuesday

Read Jeremiah 15:16.

Read this week's *Flashlight* and the passages found in the Did You Know? section. Compile a list of specific ways you can live by the mantra "Jesus only."

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Read Colossians 3:11.

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

Friday

Read Revelation 2:10.

Ellen White offers insight on the conversion of Peter.

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

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

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

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 6.

* 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 [#URlhF1rBO9s](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books). By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 24 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 4:32–5:11.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 7.

truth and you



Photo by Alister He

flashlight

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

key text

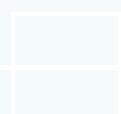
"Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet."

(Acts 5:1, 2, NIV)

did you know?

God has made the proclamation of the gospel dependent upon the labors and the gifts of His people. Voluntary offerings and the tithe constitute the revenue of the Lord's work. Of the means entrusted to man, God claims a certain portion—the tenth. He leaves all free to say whether or not they will give more than this.

But when the heart is stirred by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and a vow is made to give a certain amount, the one who vows has no longer any right to the consecrated portion. Promises of this kind made to men would be looked upon as binding; are those not more binding that are made to God? Are promises tried in the court of conscience less binding than written agreements of men? (The *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 74).



what do you think?

What do you think—Y (yes) or N (no)?

- A student can do well in school without cheating.
- Truth is always the best policy.
- Athletes caught cheating in sports should be severely punished.
- Honesty pays.
- People can't be true friends if they are not perfectly honest with each other.
- It is possible to lie by saying nothing.

INTO THE STORY

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

"Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet."

"Now a man named Ananias, together with

his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property.

With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

"Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.'

"When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

"About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, 'Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?'

"'Yes,' she said, 'that is the price.'

"Peter said to her, 'How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.'

"At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events."

(Acts 4:32-37; Acts 5:1-11, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the passages in the Into the Story section and answer the following questions:

Acts 4:32-35

What strikes you most about this picture of the early Christian church? What do you think the church needs to do today to recapture the core features of this biblical community?

Acts 4:36, 37

Note that Barnabas sold a field and “brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (The believers donated their proceeds in the same way—see verse 35.) In other words, he donated it with no strings attached. He said to the apostles, “You know where this money is needed most to build up the kingdom of God; I trust you enough to lay it at your feet.” Contrast this attitude of giving to that of Ananias and Sapphira.

Acts 5:1-11

What’s the most shocking thing to you about this story? Why?

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

“**It is God who blesses men with property, and He does this that they may be able to give toward the advancement of His cause.**”

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 75

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Hebrews 13:5.

Review your answers in the *What Do You Think?* section. Circle the statements that you are 100 percent sure about in the answer that you gave. Underline the statements that you could argue an answer of "Yes" or "No."

Sunday

Read 2 Corinthians 8:19-21.

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

What can we learn about hypocrisy?

What can we learn about giving?

Monday

Read Acts 5:1, 2.

Read the *Key Text* and consider these questions:

- Were Ananias and Sapphira required to sell the property and lay all the money at the feet of the apostles?
- What sin did they commit?
- Did their sin merit such stern punishment? Why or why not?

Tuesday

Read Deuteronomy 15:7.

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

"Let truth telling be held with no loose hand or uncertain grasp. Let it become a part of the life. Playing fast and loose with truth, and

dissembling to suit one's own selfish plans, means shipwreck of faith. 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.' Ephesians 6:14. He who utters untruths sells his soul in a cheap market. His falsehoods may seem to serve in emergencies; he may thus seem to make business advancement that he could not gain by fair dealing; but he finally reaches the place where he can trust no one. Himself a falsifier, he has no confidence in the word of others" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 76).

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Read Proverbs 19:17.

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

Friday

Read Matthew 19:21.

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

"I misrepresented my academic degrees

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

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

Ask yourself:

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

*Tamar Lewin, "Dean at MIT Resigns, Ending a 28-Year Lie," *New York Times*, April 27, 2007.

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 7.

* *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 [#UR1hf1rBQ9s](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books). By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 31 2026

power. perseverance. purpose.

Scripture Story: Acts 5:12–6:7.

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

Photo by Colleen Cahill



flashlight

"The leaders in the Jewish nation had signally failed of fulfilling God's purpose for His chosen people. Those whom the Lord had made the depositaries of truth had proved unfaithful to their trust, and God chose others to do His work. In their blindness these leaders now gave full sway to what they called righteous indignation against the ones who were setting aside their cherished doctrines. They would not admit even the possibility that they themselves did not rightly understand the Word, or that they had misinterpreted or misapplied the Scriptures. They acted like men who had lost their reason" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 78, 79).

key text

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

(Matthew 5:11, NIV)

what do you think?

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

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

did you know?

Reproach and persecution have separated many from earthly friends, but never from the love of Christ. Never is the tempest-tried soul more dearly loved by his Savior than when he is suffering reproach for the truth's sake" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 85).



INTO THE STORY

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

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

"When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, 'We found the jail securely locked, with

the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.' On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

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

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

"Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than human beings!'

(Acts 5:17-29, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Why were the religious leaders "filled with jealousy"? Does this emotion play out in your life? If so, how?

The apostles stated that they had to "obey God rather than human beings!" From the passage here, what were the specific orders from God? What were the specific orders from "human beings"?

What were some of the main problems the apostles faced? How did God solve them? What does this tell you about God?

What were the apostles' responses to the problems they faced? Do I have the same responses to the problems in my life?

What is one thing I can do differently from today onward that would change the way I tackle the problems I encounter?

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"What was the strength of those who in the past have suffered persecution for Christ's sake? It was union with God, union with the Holy Spirit, union with Christ."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 85

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18.

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

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

Sunday

Read Romans 5:3, 4.

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

Monday

Read Matthew 5:11.

Some people called Matthew 5:1-12 the "be" attitudes of the faith. Jesus concludes His beatitudes with the Key Text for this week's lesson. What blessings have you seen happen because you or someone else

was being "persecuted because of righteousness"? Share your experiences with the class.

Tuesday

Read Acts 6:1-7.

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

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Read 2 Timothy 1:7-9.

Have you ever been judged or laughed at by others for doing what is right? It takes courage to do what is right (or not doing what is wrong) even though you know you could get into all kinds of trouble for it. It takes power to forgive those who mistreat us. This courage, this power, comes only from God. It has nothing to do with our wealth or fame. And it has nothing to do with

privilege or good looks. It has everything to do with the presence of the Holy Spirit who lives within each of us who believe! How can you tap into this power? What activities can you add to your daily routine so that you remain constantly tapped into God's power?

Friday

Read Colossians 1:16 and Jeremiah 29:11.

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

this week's reading*

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

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books/#URhf1BQ9s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 07 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 6:8-15; Acts 7:44-59.

Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 10, 11.

the first Christian martyr



flashlight

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

keytext

"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen . . . who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke."

(Acts 6:8-10, NIV)

did you know?

Stoning was a punishment given for various offenses in the ancient Jewish legal system. For instance, in the laws that God gave Moses for the Israelites, one of them stated that a person could be stoned for leading family members, relatives, or friends to serve foreign gods (Deuteronomy 13:6-8). Isn't it ironic that Stephen was stoned for just the opposite reason—rebuking false worship and declaring that Jesus was the Messiah and worthy of true worship?



what do you think?

Big entertainment stars often complain about the nonstop attention that they receive.

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

- stalkers hanging around your property?
- people rummaging through your trash?
- photographers following you 24/7?
- newspaper tabloids publishing lies about you?
- fans constantly asking you for autographs?

INTO THE STORY

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

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

"So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops

speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.'

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

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

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

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

The Stoning of Stephen:
"When the members of the Sanhedrin

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

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

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

OUT OF THE STORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. . . . His death was a sore trial to the church, but it resulted in the conviction of Saul, who could not efface from his memory the faith and constancy of the martyr, and the glory that had rested on his countenance."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 101

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read 2 Timothy 3:12.

Did you complete the *What Do You Think?* activity? If you were a celebrity, what behavior would anger you most? Well, thankfully, you probably don't have to worry about being stalked by some deranged person, or chasing snoops out of your trash can.

However, if you are a follower of Christ who faithfully lives out your calling, you will face opposition. Get your Bible and read John 15:18-27. In your own words, write two sentences explaining why the world will mistreat followers of Christ.

Sunday

Read Isaiah 53:5.

After reading the *Into the Story* section, complete the *Out of the Story* questions. There's much more to Stephen's defense of his faith. Read Acts 7:1-53 to get the rest of the story. And if it's too much to read at one sitting, read some of it in the morning and then finish in the evening.

Stephen was ready to defend the faith that he had come to believe in. The Jewish leaders and their angry followers didn't go into a murderous rage until the end of Stephen's defense. What did Stephen say that set them off?

Monday

Read Acts 6:8-10.

This Sabbath's *Key Text* focuses somewhat on the aura that surrounded Stephen. Let's see. He loved God, had a great reputation, was a persuasive speaker, and he worked miracles on the side. How do you think the Jewish opposition reacted to reports of Stephen's awesome ministry in Jerusalem?

According to the *Key Text*, who was the source of Stephen's wisdom and power?

Who or what is your source of wisdom? If you spend little time with God, can you really call Him your source of wisdom and power?

Tuesday

Read John 16:33.

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

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

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

Wednesday

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

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

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

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

Thursday

Read John 11:25.

The trial and murder of Stephen touched off a wave of persecution against the people of God. One of the chief architects of the persecution was a young man named Saul. Later after he converted to following Jesus and became known as Paul, he talked sorrowfully about how he had hurt followers of Jesus. Read what Paul said (Acts 26:9-11).

At the time, Saul believed that he was doing God's bidding by persecuting Christians. He was actually working against God. Are you on God's side? How can you tell? How did Stephen die in the hope of the resurrection? (See reading for today.) How was Stephen's death a seed that helped spread the gospel of Jesus?

Friday

Read Revelation 14:13.

Stephen did not die in vain. In fact, his life gave courage to persecuted believers during his time, and it still does today. The reading for today found in Revelation 14:13 reminds us that the righteous works of those who die in the Lord will continue to follow them.

Think about this question as you go about your day today. What will your legacy be? What will you be remembered for? Ask God to help you leave a mark on earth for His glory.

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 10, 11.

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books-URhf1B09s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 14 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 9:1-18.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 12-14.

go the distance



Photo by Terrell Thomas

flashlight

"In the record of the conversion of Saul important principles are given us, which we should ever bear in mind. Saul was brought directly into the presence of Christ. He was one whom Christ intended for a most important work, one who was to be a 'chosen vessel' unto Him; yet the Lord did not at once tell him of the work that had been assigned him. He arrested him in his course and convicted him of sin; but when Saul asked, 'What wilt thou have me to do?' the Savior placed the inquiring Jew in connection with His church, there to obtain a knowledge of God's will concerning him" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 120).

keytext

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

(Philippians 3:13, 14, NIV)

what do you think?

The 2026 Winter Olympics are being held from February 4-20, in Beijing, China. It is a showcase of amazing athletes, all of whom spent years honing their skills in preparation for this moment—their moment.

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

- rest
- a healthy diet
- dreams and goals
- practice
- determination

did you know?

Did you know that the apostle Paul traveled and shared the good news about salvation through Jesus in ancient Greece? Paul was particularly familiar with the sporting events of the Greeks. In fact, no other Bible character used as many sports metaphors to describe his journey with God and that of others. For instance, as he neared the end of his life he wrote this to a young follower named Timothy: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7, NKJV).



INTO THE STORY

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

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

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

"The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but

did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

"In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!'

"'Yes, Lord,' he answered.

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

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

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

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

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

(Acts 9:1-18, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Mark the parts of this amazing story of transformation that are new to you. Had you ever heard of Paul, the man who shared the love of Jesus throughout the ancient Roman Empire? If so, what most stuck in your mind about him?

What was Paul doing before God stopped him on his way to Damascus? What words are used to describe him?

Who are some of the other players in this drama? What are their roles? For instance, what is Barnabas doing for Paul? What about Ananias?

How did people who knew Saul before his conversion experience react to him afterward? Did this discourage Saul?

What does this biblical episode teach us about Jesus?

Why do you think God struck Saul with a temporary case of blindness?

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"The prayers of the penitent Pharisee were not in vain. The inmost thoughts and emotions of his heart were transformed by divine grace; and his nobler faculties were brought into harmony with the eternal purposes of God."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 120

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read John 6:63.

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

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

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

Sunday

Read Psalm 25:9.

After reading the *Into the Story* section, complete the *Out of the Story* questions. After reading this powerful episode, one has to wonder why Jesus would bother with someone who was against His followers.

From what you've read so far about Paul in this week's lesson, share in your own words what you believe Jesus saw in him. What qualities did he possess that God wanted to use?

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

Monday

Read Philippians 3:13, 14.

This Sabbath's *Key Text* is taken from one of Paul's fantastic letters. In it he writes to members of the Christian church in a

place called Philippi, in ancient Greece. Note his use of a sports metaphor here again. He presses toward the prize, conscious that he hasn't attained it as yet.

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

Tuesday

Read Proverbs 28:13.

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

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

Wednesday

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

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

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

By surrendering like Paul, you can be transformed by the power of Jesus Christ in your life today.

Thursday

Read 2 Timothy 4:8 and Romans 8:38, 39.

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

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

Friday

Read Isaiah 30:21.

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

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

this week's reading*

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

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#URlhF1rB09s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 21 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 12:1-23; 1 Peter; 2 Peter.
Commentary: The *Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 15, 51, 52.

evidence of conversion



Photo by Colleen P. Callahan

flashlight

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

key text

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

(2 Peter 1:3, NIV)

did you know?

Most scholars believe that First and Second Peter were both written by the apostle Peter. He addressed the letters to Jewish Christians throughout Asia Minor who were being persecuted for their faith. First Peter is a message of comfort and encouragement to remember that through all the suffering in this world Jesus offers hope. While he wrote his first letter to teach about prevailing through persecution (external trials), he wrote the second letter to teach about handling heresy in the church (internal trials).



Below are a few statements of miracles, grace, and love.

Which ones do you believe completely? (Circle these.) Which ones do you have doubts about? (Put a question mark by these.)

- a. I believe in miracles.
- b. Every life is a miracle.
- c. Miracles occur more for people of faith.
- d. Grace is impossible to fully grasp.
- e. I am 100 percent positive that I am saved by grace.
- f. I believe that God loves all people equally.
- g. I believe that only people filled with the Holy Spirit are capable of fully loving others.

what do you think?

INTO THE STORY

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

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

"The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the

Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. 'Quick, get up!' he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

"Then the angel said to him, 'Put on your clothes and sandals.' And Peter did so. 'Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,' the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

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

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

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

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

(Acts 12:1-17, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the passages in the Into the Story section and answer the following questions:

What is the irony in verses 13-15?

How much faith did the believers at that prayer meeting really have?

If you were a defense attorney, how would you defend these Christians?

How might the scene of Peter's knocking at the door and their reluctance to believe it was Peter be impacted by the detail provided in verse 2?

What part did their prayers play in Peter's escape? Explain.

Why do you think God chose to perform a miracle on behalf of Peter?

What does this suggest about Peter's importance to the early Christian church?

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"Trial is part of the education given in the school of Christ, to purify God's children from the dross of earthliness. . . . Trials and obstacles are His chosen methods of discipline, and His appointed conditions of success."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 524

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Psalm 106:2.

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

Sunday

Read Acts 20:24.

Think about all the stories you know of the apostle Peter—walking on the water, denying Christ, asking Jesus to drench his entire body at the Lord's Supper, and so on. Next, read through First and Second Peter. Scan the book of Acts, looking for additional stories about Peter. Finally, read the story of Peter's escape from prison in the *Into the Story* section. What are three lessons that you can take from Peter's life that can be of help to you? Write them below.

Monday

Read 2 Peter 1:3.

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

Tuesday

Read Matthew 11:20.

Review the *Flashlight* section and reflect on these questions: Why do you think Peter first had to be "led to self-renunciation" before receiving his call from God?

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

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

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Read Psalm 71:18.

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

What do you think Ellen White means by "Christian perfection"?

Friday

Read Philippians 1:27.

What can I learn about miracles from Peter?

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

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

Love is: _____

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 15, 51, 52.

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at [#URlhF1B09s](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books). By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

FEBRUARY 28 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 11:19-26; Acts 13; Acts 14:1-26.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 16-18.

the epicenter for missions



Photo by Paulina Lelko

flashlight

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

key text

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

(Acts 13:38, 39, NIV)

what do you think?

Twenty-one centuries later the church still faces many of the challenges the first century faced when confronted with the Great Commission to take the gospel to the entire world.

Take some time to finish the sentences below as they relate to your reaction and personal attitudes and understanding about mission work:

1. When someone brings up the topic of missions, I . . .
2. The idea of witnessing to a non-Adventist/Christian makes me . . .
3. For me, missions is about . . .

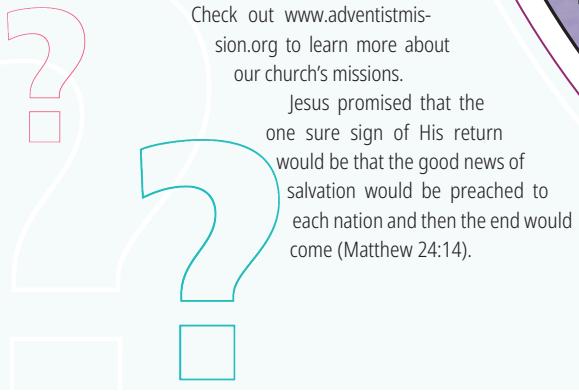
did you know?

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

There are more than 230 major languages and dialects in the world. The Adventist Church is spreading the good news in 75 languages (see www.awr.org).

Check out www.adventistmission.org to learn more about our church's missions.

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



INTO THE STORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored

the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

"The word of the Lord spread through the whole region."

(Acts 11:19-26; selected texts from Acts 13, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Antioch, and not Jerusalem, was the epicenter for missionary outreach. Can you list some of the reasons this might have been the case?

Why do you think the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch?

How did the "followers of the Way" come to be called "Christians"? What does this say about their characteristics?

What pattern did you see from the Scripture lesson for how the church prepared for missionary work? List the strategies used for moving out of the "community of believers" and into the world.

What was the strategy of Barnabas and Paul as they entered each new region to spread the good news about Jesus?

punch lines

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

"**Therefore, my friends,** I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38, 39, NIV).

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

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

further insight

"**The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but . . . consecrated laymen of varied talent who have a knowledge of the word of God and who know the power of His grace, to consider the needs of the unwarned cities. Time is rapidly passing, and there is much to be done."**"

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 158, 159

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Acts 13:38.

In the *What Do You Think?* section you shared your reactions to and attitudes about missions. Why did you answer the way you did? What can you do to fulfill your concept of mission?

Sunday

Read Acts 11:25, 26.

Look back through the *Into the Story* and *Out of the Story* sections. Notice that while Barnabas and Paul launch out on the “first missionary journey,” they did not act alone. Both men were called. Yet we don’t see Paul moving full steam ahead with that call until the Lord confirms and commissions him through the ministry of fellow believers and elders of the church. Even in the mission field, Paul and Barnabas counted on the blessing and prayers of the believers back at their home base in Antioch, and on the spiritual support and encouragement of the new converts in the towns where they took the gospel.

What does this teach us about the role of the church in helping us to define and act upon the call God gives us? What does it say about the personal role we each have regardless of whether we are full-time church workers or members of the body of Christ?

Monday

Read Acts 13:38, 39.

Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses” (NIV). These words that Paul preached to encourage the devout people in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch were the theme of his ministry and preach-

ing. This is because no matter what cultural background we are from or what language or mind-set we have, one common thread all humans share is the need for hope!

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

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

Tuesday

Read Galatians 4:18.

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

Wednesday

Read Acts 13:15, 49.

Here we get a glimpse of how the early church worked—at first, it was comprised of Jewish believers in Jesus, many

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

Thursday

Read Isaiah 60:1.

What are some of the ways you can reach out to your world with the gospel? How can you share the good news with someone at school or at work? Is there a place in which God is calling you to go and labor? Could teaching English overseas, for example, be a way to enter a new culture, make friends, and share Jesus?

Friday

Read 1 Peter 2:9.

One of the key challenges in the Bible is that we are asked to do something with what we have learned and experienced in the Word: these are not mere stories for our entertainment, but rather they are examples for us to follow: “Go and do likewise,” Jesus said (Luke 10:37, NIV). What are the things you’ve learned this week that can be picked up and used in your life?

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 16-18.

* *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 [#URlhF1rBO9s](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books). By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 07 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 15:1-17.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders)*, chapters 19-21.

us and them

Photo by Clever Call



flashlight

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

keytext

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

(Acts 15:10, 11, NIV)

what do you think?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

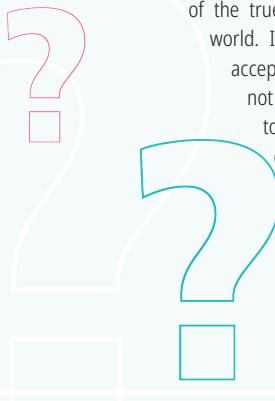
— “Holding to human traditions is more of a problem in the church today than racial prejudice.”

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

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

did you know?

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



INTO THE STORY

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

“The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the believers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who

belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.’

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

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

(Acts 15:1-17, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the story and *underline* what you think are key phrases to understanding what this passage is about.

Draw a circle around all of the individuals and people groups mentioned in this story.

Describe what you see as the social and religious dynamics that are going on in the New Testament church at this time.

Who are these “certain men” who demanded that Gentile believers be circumcised? What do you see as their spiritual focus?

Why did Paul and Barnabas go to Jerusalem, and why do you think they went through Gentile territory on their way to counsel with the apostles in Jerusalem?

What is the yoke that Peter referred to in verse 10?

After Peter speaks to the assembled leaders of the Christian church, Paul and Barnabas add their stories of Gentile believers they have met in their journeys. How do you think these stories impacted the congregation? How are such stories important to the decisions we make?

What do you think God is trying to say to us today in this story?

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

“The greater the responsibilities placed upon the human agent, and the larger his opportunities to dictate and control, the more harm he is sure to do if he does not carefully follow the way of the Lord and labor in harmony with the decisions arrived at by the general body of believers in united council.”

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 199

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Romans 4:16.

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

Sunday

Read Psalm 22:27, 28.

Read the *Into the Story* portion and use the questions in the *Out of the Story* section to guide your study. The story is a look at the real church—one with obstacles and problems that need to be worked out as people are doing the mission of Christ.

How are the conflict and conversations of the New Testament church similar to the ones you hear in your part of the world? In what way are these problems universal and part of a "human problem"? What can we learn from this council of believers that might help us stay focused on the work we are called to do? What do you sense God is trying to teach you in this story?

Monday

Read Acts 15:10, 11.

The Key Text to memorize this week emphasizes that the way to salvation is the same for everyone. There is an "us and them" mentality that cannot be avoided when doing the mission of Christ. There are those who believe and those who don't know. How

we see "them" should be framed by how God saved "us." Through the lens of God's grace we see the people of the world not as different people with different problems, but as possibilities. How do you react when you hear mission stories or testimonies of people coming to find Christ?

Thursday

Read Romans 9:8.

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

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

Friday

Read Galatians 3:29.

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

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 19-21.

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#URlhF1rB09s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 14 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 17:1-34; Acts 18:1-17.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 22-24.

faith works



flashlight

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

keytext

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

(Ephesians 4:13, 14, NLT)

did you know?

Instead of indulging in poetic descriptions and fanciful representations, which might please the senses and feed the imagination, but which would not touch the daily experience, Paul sought by the use of simple language to bring home to the heart the truths that are of vital importance. Fanciful representations of truth may cause an ecstasy of feeling, but all too often truths presented in this way do not supply the food necessary to strengthen and fortify the believer for the battles of life. The immediate needs, the present trials, of struggling souls—these must be met with sound, practical instruction in the fundamental principles of Christianity" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 252).



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

Define belief and values in your own words.

Belief is _____

Values are _____

what do you think?

INTO THE STORY

"That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men....

"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

"He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic

philosophers.

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

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

"So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: 'Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: "To an Unknown God." This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about. . . .

"God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.'

"When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, 'We want to hear more about this later.' That ended Paul's discussion with them, but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

(Acts 17:10-23, 30-34, NLT)

OUT OF THE STORY

List all the people and groups that responded positively to Paul's efforts. Next, list the ones who rejected him. What were the differences in attitude or beliefs that led to the different outcomes?

Compare the people in Berea with the people in Thessalonica and Athens. When people talk to me about God and the Bible, which group do I most resemble?

Paul was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw in the city. Do we find ourselves troubled by the godlessness around us? Should we be? Explain.

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

What does Paul's discussion with the Athenians tell us about how we should relate to nonbelievers?

punch lines

"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (*Philippians 2:9-11, NIV*).

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

"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (*John 3:18, NIV*).

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (*1 John 5:13, NIV*).

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (*Romans 10:17, NIV*).

further insight

"Those who are sincerely seeking for truth will make a careful investigation, in the light of God's Word, of the doctrines presented to them."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 232

"As [the Bereans] compared scripture with scripture, heavenly angels were beside them, enlightening their minds and impressing their hearts."

— Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 231

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read John 3:18.

Do you find that faith and spiritual values influence the choices you make in your life? If so, how?

Sunday

Read Romans 10:17.

As you read the Into the Story section and use the questions in the Out of the Story section, ask yourself: What did I learn that was new and I didn't know before? How does this change the way I relate to God and the Bible?

What does this text tell you about God? What does this text tell you about you? What does this text tell you about your relationship with God?

Monday

Read Ephesians 4:13, 14.

Break down this week's Key Text into a list of benefits that come from having an intimate relationship with God. The depth of a relationship is evidenced in the intimacy and trust we have with the other person. Until we come to know God personally, a relationship with Him will simply be a vague concept. How would you describe your rela-

tionship with God? As a vague concept or a reality enacted in your daily communications with Him?

The goal of our relationships with God and others is one of maturity. The Key Text shares how that maturity is achieved: through unity in our faith and our knowledge of Jesus. How are these attributes expressed in our relationships?

Tuesday

Read Acts 1:8.

Read the quote in the Flashlight section of this week's lesson. Then read Acts 18:1-17. What conclusions can you draw about God's promises?

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?

How can these Punch Lines help you to be "mature in the Lord"?

Thursday

Read Philippians 2:9-11.

A personal testimony of your life-changing relationship with God is very powerful in underscoring His message of love and forgiveness. Prepare your personal testimony of how you became a Christian and practice it by sharing with the class. Keep it to three minutes, using the following outline:

- Before—What my life was like before I got to know Christ
- During—How I came to trust Christ
- After—In what ways I am different now

Friday

Read 1 John 5:13.

People invest time and energy into attaining better grades, developing their career, their bodies, and relationships, but often neglect the spiritual dimension of their lives. How do you invest time and energy into growing your relationship with God?

*Glen Schultz, *Kingdom Education* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1998), p. 39.

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 22-24.

* *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 [#URhf1rBO9s](http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books). By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 21 2026

hope against hope

Scripture Story: Acts 18:18-28; 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 25, 26.



flashlight

"Paul had necessarily adapted his manner of teaching to the condition of the church. 'I, brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual,' he afterward explained to them, 'but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.' 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2. Many of the Corinthian believers had been slow to learn the lessons that he was endeavoring to teach them. . . . However wise they might be in worldly knowledge, they were but babes in the knowledge of Christ" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 271).

keytext

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

(1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, NIV)

did you know?

The watchful Christian is a working Christian, seeking zealously to do all in his power for the advancement of the gospel. As love for his Redeemer increases, so also does love for his fellow men. He has severe trials, as had his Master; but he does not allow affliction to sour his temper or destroy his peace of mind. He knows that trial, if well borne, will refine and purify him, and bring him into closer fellowship with Christ. Those who are partakers of Christ's sufferings will also be partakers of His consolation and at last sharers of His glory" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 261).



what do you think?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- I don't think about Jesus' coming very often—it's too far away.
- I don't think that Jesus' second coming affects my life right now.
- Knowing that Jesus will come again and let me live for eternity makes me take things in life more seriously.
- I believe that when I die, it is not the end for me, and that when Jesus returns I will be reunited with the people I love who believed in Jesus.

INTO THE STORY

"As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a

human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

"Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

(1 Thessalonians 4, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What is the reason for Paul's letter?

What things does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do in their spiritual growth?

Why do you think that Paul's explanation of what will happen at the Second Coming was so important to these people?

How would it have affected their lives on a personal level to have this information? How would they see things differently?

How might this knowledge have changed how they felt and encouraged them? How might it change and encourage you?

If you had no hope of a resurrection in Jesus, how would it change your outlook on life?

punch lines

"And I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (**Acts 24:15, 16, NIV**).

"For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" (**Romans 8:24, NIV**).

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (**Hebrews 11:1, NIV**).

"There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" (**Proverbs 23:18, NIV**).

"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold" (**2 Corinthians 3:12, NIV**).

further insight

"There are in the world today many who close their eyes to the evidences that Christ has given to warn men of His coming. They seek to quiet all apprehension, while at the same time the signs of the end are rapidly fulfilling, and the world is hastening to the time when the Son of man shall be revealed in the clouds of heaven."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 260

connecting to life

Sabbath

Read **Acts 24:15, 16**.

Sometimes we hear about Jesus' second coming so often that we stop feeling how important it is. But think about it today. What if Jesus weren't coming? What if death were the end? What if we would never see our loved ones again, and after they were gone, we had to say goodbye forever? What if your eventual death would be the absolute end of you, and your life on earth had no meaning beyond the few years you spent here? What a depressing thought! When you really think about it, Jesus coming again and raising us back to life is good news! How do you think that Jesus' coming again affects you today?

preacher? What can you do in your own personal life that will show others that there is more to life than just the here and now?

Sunday

Read **Romans 8:24**.

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12, NIV).

Think about Paul's advice to the Thessalonians. How can you lead a life that will win the respect of the people around you? Is there a difference between winning people's respect and being popular?

Monday

Read **1 Thessalonians 4:16-18**.

First Thessalonians 4:16-18 tells how Jesus will come and raise the dead. Paul advises us to encourage each other with this knowledge. How can we encourage others with the knowledge that there is something more than life on earth? Is there a way to tell others about this without seeming like a street

Tuesday

Read **Proverbs 23:18**.

Ellen White explains how Paul had to adapt his preaching to reach people at different levels of their spiritual development. The Corinthians were baby Christians, and they needed a different approach than mature Christians would need. Paul said they still needed milk. That didn't mean that they were of less value or lower in status. We don't believe that babies matter less than we do; in fact, we give them more care and attention because they are so vulnerable! Do you take your friends' level of spiritual interest into account when you talk to them about your life with God? Would you consider yourself a mature Christian yet? What can you do to grow in your spiritual experience?

Wednesday

The verses in the *Punch Lines* talk about hope and what hope does for us in our lives. What hope do you have because of your belief in Jesus? How has that hope for forgiveness, heaven, and eternal life changed your life? How is your life different than someone else's life who might live without the hope you have? Hope gives us the courage to step out and try more than we ever thought we could! What do you think God wants you to try today?

Thursday

Read **2 Corinthians 3:12**.

We can see from Paul's way of approaching the Thessalonians and the Corinthians that he was willing to adjust himself to meet the needs of the people. While God wants us to be true to who He created us to be, and while He does not want us to compromise our beliefs or ethics, He does want us to be flexible in the service of others. Everyone has different needs. Some people could just use a smile. Others could use an honest, friendly conversation. Others might need something as elemental as a warm meal or a secondhand coat. Try to see others as an opportunity for service. What needs can you meet?

Friday

Read **Hebrews 11:1**.

ife is not just about the 70-odd years we might spend on this planet. It isn't about getting as much money as possible, or about experiencing as much as possible. While God certainly wants us to live our lives to the fullest, we aren't supposed to do that at the expense of others. After studying this week, do you feel differently about the fact that Jesus is going to come again to raise the dead and bring us to live with Him? Do you see life any differently? What responsibility do you feel toward others in their spiritual experience?

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 25, 26.

* *Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at <http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s>. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the *Conflict of the Ages* Series each year.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 28 2026

Scripture Story: Acts 19; Acts 20:1.

Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 27, 28.

the inspiring minority



Photo by The Class Law

flashlight

"It was by cherishing a humble, teachable spirit that these men gained the experience that enabled them to go out as workers into the harvest field. Their example presents to Christians a lesson of great value. There are many who make but little progress in the divine life because they are too self-sufficient to occupy the position of learners. They are content with a superficial knowledge of God's Word. They do not wish to change their faith or practice and hence make no effort to obtain greater light" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 283).

keytext

"God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them."

(Acts 19:11, 12, NIV)

what do you think?

Do you know the saying, "You can't make everyone happy all of the time?" In any group of people, at any time of day, there will always be someone who loves you, someone who hates you, someone who thinks you make ridiculous decisions, and someone who respects you from a distance. There are times, however, when the balance seems to be off!

Have you ever had an experience when you felt like everyone was against you? Have you ever been picked on? What do you think the reason was for this?

did you know?

If the followers of Christ were but earnest seekers after wisdom, they would be led into rich fields of truth as yet wholly unknown to them. He who will give himself fully to God will be guided by the divine hand. He may be lowly and apparently ungifted; yet if with a loving, trusting heart he obeys every intimation of God's will, his powers will be purified, ennobled, energized, and his capabilities will be increased. As he treasures the lessons of divine wisdom, a sacred commission will be entrusted to him; he will be enabled to make his life an honor to God and a blessing to the world" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 283, 284).



INTO THE STORY

"About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: 'You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.'

"When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

"The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'

"The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: 'Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this com-

motion,
since there is no
reason for it.' After he
had said this, he dismissed the
assembly."

(Acts 19:3-41, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What was the reason for Demetrius's behavior toward Paul?

Do you think that Paul was aware of why the city had been thrown into an uproar? Why or why not?

Do you think that the city clerk was courageous in facing the mob? Why or why not?

What do you think had a calming effect on the crowd?

In the mob, it says that "most of the people did not even know why they were there." What made them follow the group in this show of rage?

What can we learn from this story about peer pressure?

punch lines

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9, NIV).

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13, NIV).

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matthew 7:13, NIV).

"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all" (Isaiah 7:9, NIV).

"Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident" (Psalm 27:3, NIV).

"Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13, NIV).

further insight

"If the follower of Christ would grow up 'unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13), he must eat of the bread of life and drink of the water of salvation. He must watch and pray and work, in all things giving heed to the instructions of God in His Word."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 284, 285

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Psalm 27:3.

Have you ever felt as if everyone was against you? Perhaps you were being picked on for not fitting in, or maybe you did something that was considered unpopular. Regardless of the reason why, being the unpopular minority is never a comfortable experience. As a Christian, you might find yourself in this situation in order to stand up for what you believe in. Psalm 27:3 says: "Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident" (NIV).

Are you willing to take a stand for what is right, even if you are the only one to do it? How can you do so fearlessly and confidently?

Sunday

Read Joshua 1:9.

In our story this week, we see one man's ambition for wealth and position fueling a mob against Paul. Paul had not hurt anyone. In fact, he was preaching love and decent living! He might not have even known that the riot was caused by one man who resented the decrease in his sales of idols. This was a terrifying situation. Sometimes when it feels like the entire world is against us, it isn't because of anything we have done wrong. Sometimes it is about something else entirely. How can you trust God enough to continue doing the right thing, even when everything seems to go crazy around you?

Monday

Read Acts 19:11, 12.

The Key Text chosen for memorizing this week tells us about the miracles that God worked for people through Paul. God was able to work through Paul because Paul was both humble and determined to do the right thing no matter what the cost. People were healed and made happier because of God's use of Paul. What do you think God could do through you for your friends and acquaintances if you let Him? How could other people be made happier because they knew you? How might they realize that there is a God because of your life?

Tuesday

Read Acts 4:13.

Ellen White emphasizes the need for Christians to be humble. Christians need to take God seriously, not themselves! If we take ourselves too seriously, we end up like the bully who was so concerned about his sales. In order for God to do something with us, He has to be able to teach us; and to be able to teach us, we have to be flexible. There is always something more to learn, something deeper to realize. Try to consciously keep an open mind today and ask God to teach you something new.

Wednesday

Read Matthew 7:13.

It isn't easy sometimes doing the right thing. It seems that the right path tends to be the harder one a lot of the time! (Mark 13:13). But God never asks us to do it alone. God is with us, protecting us and supporting us every step of the way. It takes courage to face adversity in order to do what God asks us to do. It takes courage to be different from the rest of the crowd. It is that God-given courage that sets us apart and makes it obvious that we have been with Jesus. Have

you been waffling about something you believe in? Ask God for the courage to stand firm, and watch how He blesses you for your commitment!

Thursday

Read Isaiah 7:9.

It's much easier to be in the majority, blending in and enjoying the approval of your peers than it is to be the unpopular minority. In any group, there are always the few who are picked on and aren't accepted. It isn't easy to stand up against the majority, but if no one does, nothing will ever change! Are there any people in your social sphere who are left out or picked on? Do you have the courage to stand up for them and do the right thing, even though you would have to oppose the popular majority? How big of a difference could you make in one person's life for taking a stand?

Friday

Read Mark 13:13.

God expects us to stand firm on the important issues. In your relationship with God, what issues has God shown you to be most important? What issues or positions matter most to you? What is worth standing for? And how can you stand firm in a way that shows people the kind, gracious, awesome God we serve?

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 27, 28.

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