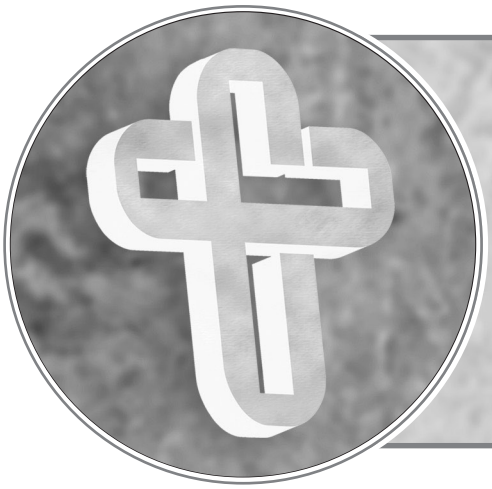


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
NOVEMBER 08 2025

the choice

Scripture Story: Mark 14:32-42.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 74.
Key Text: Mark 14:35, 36.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Next to His death on Calvary, Jesus' season of struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane is the second pivotal point in the history of our salvation. The drama of God's plan to redeem humanity reaches a climax: Jesus must willingly choose to give His life as a ransom for many or He will fail. Some suggest that Jesus could have walked away and left humanity to perish. In the garden, He faced that excruciating choice.

Several powerful themes come through in this lesson. First, in the garden we get a strong sense of the horror of sin. Look at the way Jesus shrinks back from the pain. Even He can barely stand up under the weight of it. "So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father's love" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685). Can He then face up to doing God's will? It is likely that your students will understand both the temptation to go their own way and the anxiety of trusting God's will over their own.

Finally, a spiritual fight of universal proportions takes place in the olive grove called Gethsemane. The name means "the olive press," and it is no coincidence that Christ is squeezed to complete exhaustion by unimaginable agony.

It is important to convey to students that we will never have to go through the second-death experience because Christ has already done it for us. In Gethsemane He looked at becoming the Sin-bearer in the face and chose God's will over human wishes. Jesus made the decision to "be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- See the horror of sin and the love of God. *(Know)*
- Sense the battle that rages between good and evil. *(Feel)*
- Decide that embracing God's will is the way to eternal life. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Experience of Salvation, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 10: "In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab.

2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-10; 8:1-4, 14-17; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

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

As the students share their responses to the ranking exercise, invite them to share why they responded the way they did. You can make your way down the list of options, asking, "How many of you chose _____ as your first choice?" Comment briefly on the significance of each event and ask: "What do you think was the most painful part of Gethsemane—what He knew about the future, or what He did not know?" Some might say, "Jesus knows everything." But the Bible says that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB). How does Christ negotiate the path of "knowing no sin" to "becoming sin"? Is there a greater example of going from one extreme to another?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The ocean is earth's last little-known frontier. Scientists have shown us how most of the ocean that immediately surrounds land, about 60 meters (200 feet) deep, is filled with the beauty of rich marine life. But this is only about 1/20 of the total ocean on earth. Beyond this relatively shallow zone, much of the ocean drops to depths of as much as 3,500 to 6,000 meters (11,500–20,000 feet), in areas called abyssal plains. They make up more than 50 percent of the ocean floor. These are not the deepest places in the ocean, however. In some areas of the western Pacific Ocean, the sea floor drops away into elongated gashes, called trenches, with water depths of 10,000 to 11,000 meters (33,000–36,000 feet).

The deepest parts of the ocean are mostly unknown and unseen by human beings. While the shallow zones are visible as beautiful and alive, the deep, inaccessible parts are shrouded in darkness and mystery.

Now imagine the great stoop that Jesus took when He came into our sin-polluted world and identified with sinful human beings in order to save us.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

In the Garden of Gethsemane Christ chose to experience the punishment of sin at its deepest, darkest level. While we human beings splash around the reefs thinking sin isn't so bad, we simply have no clue what Jesus experienced when He chose to take the cup of suffering. At each point of prayer in the garden, Christ plummeted deeper and deeper into the darkness, getting a foretaste of the horror that awaited Him at Calvary. Not the whips or the nails pained Him most, but the deep, dark pit of separation from God. Read the story of Christ in the garden and imagine His agony, paying careful attention to His decision.

Out of the Story *for Teachers*

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

- Read this story and make a list of things Christ knew and didn't know about the future.
- How do you think the disciples reacted to hearing Jesus say, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" in verse 34? When has Christ ever spoken like this or conveyed such emotion?
- Underline the phrases in this passage that indicate how much the decision to go forward to Calvary weighed on Christ.
- Why did Jesus want the disciples to keep praying? Was it for them or Him that He longed for them to be praying?
- How is Christ's attitude in verses 41 and 42 different from the first part of the scene?
- Why do you think the story of Gethsemane is such a pivotal story told in Scripture? What does this event reveal about Christ?
- What do you think was "the cup" Christ

referred to in His prayer to the Father?

Extra Questions for Teachers

Agree or Disagree

- The hardest prayer anyone will ever pray is "Lord, not my will, but yours be done." Why?

Agree or Disagree

- The emotional trauma and knowledge of becoming the Sinbearer was far more torturous than any physical trauma Jesus endured. Why?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Genesis 3; Job 1; Genesis 22; Acts 9; Matthew 4.

Sharing Context and Background

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

The setting for this week's study on Christ's struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane is clear. It was the night of the Passover meal and just prior to His arrest. Judas is in the process of carrying out his horrible betrayal. The accounts of this event are portrayed in all four Gospels, some offering very little detail while others are as graphic as possible.

Matthew 26:36-50
Mark 14:32-46
Luke 22:39-49
John 18:1, 2

The focus of Jesus' season of agony in the garden is a choice He must make if He is to redeem humanity from their sin. It is appropriate that the decision to accept sin's price came in a garden. Human history began in a garden (Genesis 2:7-25), as did sin (Genesis 3). Adam and Eve's choice to go their own way versus the revealed will of God's way infected humanity with sin. Now Christ faced the decision to obey God's will and stick to the plan of redemption.

The Temptation

When Jesus was first tempted by Satan in the wilderness, He was not tempted to lie, cheat, steal, or commit adultery. He was tempted to abort the plan of God to redeem humanity by His blood (Matthew 4).

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Word Wrestling

The problem with language is that it often fails to capture fully what is taking place. Paraphrasing a verse or passage challenges students to pay close attention to the meanings of words—especially if you use the following rule: Rewrite this verse, but you cannot use any words currently in the passage, except for essentials such as: *it, to, the, and, but, for*, etc. Have students practice paraphrasing familiar passages such as John 3:16 or 1 John 1:9. As students do this, they use higher order thinking skills and must try to understand the meaning of the passage by wrestling with the meaning of key words.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

When Jesus described His upcoming death at the hands of the Jews, Peter launched a rebuke at Jesus that prompted Jesus to reply, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mark 8:33). Jesus rebukes Peter for urging what Satan wants more than anything else—for Him to avoid Calvary. Even while Jesus was on the cross, Satan tried to tempt Him to give up on the plan. Thus, he incited the people to shout:

"'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, "I am the Son of God"'" (Matthew 27:40-43).

The temptation had been the same in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew's account of the dramatic time of prayer depicts Christ going back three times, saying, "Let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Have students (in pairs) make a list of as many sins committed by people in Scripture as they can think of. Give them one to two minutes. Then, in one minute, have them add to that a list of the most heinous sins committed in history. Then, at the bottom of the list simply write, "My sin." Invite the students to be ready to read the lists out loud while you do the following demonstration.

The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate how Christ took the cup of sin willingly. Using a large cup or glass, fill the container halfway with water and add elements that will drastically taint this water (dirt, oil, vinegar, ketchup, etc.). Have the students name the sins as you add the elements. At the end of the lists, when the cup is full, say, "Christ said, 'Father, let this cup pass from Me, but not My will but Yours be done.' " Christ took the cup when He made the choice to go to Calvary.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Gethsemane is truly one of Christ's defining moments. We all have moments where we reach a crossroad. We have the option to go one way or turn to the other, but a choice is required. You make a decision, and that decision ultimately makes you.

Jesus suffered unimaginable agony in Gethsemane with His choice. What do we do with what happened to Christ in the garden? One response is to thank Him for His willingness to take the cup. Another response might be to mirror His willingness to pray, "Not my will but yours be done." It's likely to be the hardest prayer you will ever pray. But pray it about specific areas of your life and things will change. Your choice to live by God's plan for your life will produce a peace and a confidence that will enable you to deal with any adversity. In fact, knowing that Christ chose to experience death, the second death—anything you face from here on out pales in comparison to what waits for those who are faithful to Christ. As Paul says, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). When Christ faced His choice in Gethsemane, it is likely that He could see only the immediate future. But Paul assures us of the promise that:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages (*or *Humble Hero*), chapter 74.

Humble Hero is book 3 in a special adaptation of the Conflict of the Ages series, created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Read more about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Mark 14:32-42.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 74.

the choice



Photo by Colleen Cahill

keytext

"He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.' "

(Mark 14:35, 36, NKJV)

flashlight

"[Christ] felt that by sin He was being separated from His Father. The gulf was so broad, so black, so deep, that His spirit shuddered before it. This agony He must not exert His divine power to escape. As man He must suffer the consequences of man's sin. As man He must endure the wrath of God against transgression" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 686).

what do you think?

Rank the following moments according to what you think caused Christ the most agony.

____ Enduring the scourging/beating.
____ Hearing His own people cry "crucify Him."
____ Being betrayed and abandoned by His closest friends.
____ Deciding to accept the cup of suffering and sin in Gethsemane.
____ Experiencing the absence of God on Calvary.

All the events surrounding the passion of Christ were severely traumatic. What do you think was most traumatic for Christ? Why? If you had to go through a traumatic experience, would you prefer to have it forced upon you or to face it knowing it was your choice?

did you know?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke, says of Christ, "And being in agony prayed fervently . . ." The Greek word for agony means to be "engaged in combat." The word "agony" was used by the Greeks to denote "intense emotion," and severe emotional and physical anguish. It is the same word they used for the arena in which battles would take place for entertainment. What was so entertaining to them was the intense life-and-death emotion that characterized the games. Clearly, what took place in the Garden of Gethsemane was a battle, filled with intense emotion.

From *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

INTO THE STORY

"Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, 'Sit here while I pray.' And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.'

"He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.'

"Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

"Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.

"Then He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and resting? It is enough! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand.'"

(Mark 14:32-42, NKJV)



OUT OF THE STORY

After you read this story, make a list of things Jesus knew and didn't know about the future.

_____
_____
_____

How do you think the disciples reacted to hearing Jesus say, in verse 34, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death" (NKJV)?

_____
_____

When had Christ ever spoken like this or conveyed such emotion?

_____
_____

Underline the phrases in this passage that indicate how much the decision to go forward to Calvary weighed on Christ.

Why did Jesus want the disciples to keep praying? Was it for them or Him that He longed for them to be praying?

_____
_____

How is Christ's attitude in verses 41 and 42 different from the first part of the scene?

_____
_____
_____

Why do you think the story of Gethsemane is such a pivotal story told in Scripture? What does this event reveal about Christ?

_____
_____
_____

What do you think was "the cup" Christ referred to in His prayer to the Father?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" **(Hebrews 4:15, 16, NKJV).**

"[Christ] who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered" **(Hebrews 5:7, 8, NKJV).**

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" **(2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV).**

"And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, 'Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men'" **(Mark 8:31-33, NKJV).**

"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" **(John 10:17, 18, NIV).**

further insight

"So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father's love."

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685

Sabbath

Read John 10:17, 18.

Read and respond to the question in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson. Does it matter that Christ had the choice to go to Calvary or to walk away? Of all the painful experiences that faced Christ in the garden, the reality of our hopelessness pained him more. In a way, what happened after He made His choice was horrible, but by that time He had resolved to endure it. Reflect on the fact that Christ was not the victim caught between a rock and a hard place, but a Savior willingly offering His life as a sacrifice. What do you think is the difference?

_____

_____

_____

Sunday

Read Hebrews 5:7, 8.

Read the *Into the Story* section and use the questions in the *Out of the Story* section to guide your study. Up to this point in the life of Christ, He had been in control and deliberate about God's plan. But in Gethsemane this attitude changed. Christ's humanity shrank from the task and longed for another way, but finally accepted the hard part of the plan. What do you think are some of the key truths that emerge about Christ and you in the Garden of Gethsemane? In what way does a similar spiritual war occur in your life today? What message does Christ's victory in the garden give to you as you make choices about your life?

_____

_____

_____

Monday

Read Mark 14:35, 36.

The *Key Text* this week is perhaps the hardest prayer to pray: "Not what I will, but what You will." In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to pray this prayer? What is it about God's will that tends to make us hesitant to embrace it? Is there any question that God has our best in mind? Or, is it that God's ways of accomplishing His will in our lives aren't always what we would choose?

Take a few moments and identify three or four friends that you believe want to live fully for God. Pray a prayer of surrender to God's will as the Savior did in the garden for yourself and for your friends.

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Read the quote in the *Flashlight* section and imagine the worst of what sin can do. Consider the most repulsive of sin's effects on this earth and on people, and reflect on what must have made Christ "shudder" against what He was going to face. As hard as it is to wonder what Christ faced, as sinners we can never imagine what sin looks like from the perspective of One who "knew no sin." Whom do you know that has a real hatred for sin and a deep sense of the love of God?

_____

_____

_____

If Ellen White emphasizes anything in this chapter, it is the full exposure of both hatred of sin and love of God. Make a list in your journal of what you love about God's love and a list of the things you hate about sin. Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His will and His willingness to redeem you.

Wednesday

The *Punch Lines* texts in this week's lesson touch on Christ's choice to embrace God's will and die for humanity. Read the list and identify two or three that really speak to you personally. Why do these passages connect with you today? If you were to order these verses to be read in a sequence like a Bible study, how would you organize them? Think of someone you know who might be encouraged or inspired by these passages and share them. Feel free to add any other verses you think would encourage or inspire.

_____

_____

_____

Thursday

Read Hebrews 4:15, 16.

Gethsemane was about a choice. Clearly, the most important decision made on earth happened in that garden. It is likely that you have some pressing decisions to make in your life, but none more important than accepting Christ's sacrifice for you. Sometime this week, go to a garden, or the closest thing to a garden, and make the decision to receive God's grace and embrace His will for your life. You might want to take a few moments to journal or write about your experience in the garden and keep it in your Bible for future reference.

Friday

Read 1 Corinthians 15:22.

Two choices. Two gardens. Reflect on the choice made in Eden, which ushered in a world of sin for humanity. Also, reflect on the choice Christ made in the Garden of Gethsemane thousands of years later. A third choice still remains that opens the way to eternal life in a garden home in heaven. Adam and Eve made a choice. Christ made His choice. What will be your choice?

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages or (*Humble Hero*), chapter 74.

*A special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, entitled *Humble Hero*, has been created just for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at: www.cornerstoneconnections.net. By following this plan you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.