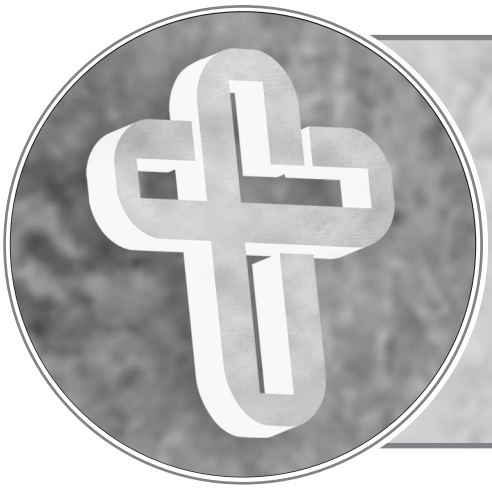


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
DECEMBER 27, 2025

calling change agents

Scripture Story: Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 86; 87.
Key Text: Acts 1:1:10, 11.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

When Jesus ascended from this earth, He left a clear mission for His followers: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19, 20, NIV). Two men dressed in white punctuated this command of Christ with the pointed question: "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" (Acts 1:11, NIV).

Still today, as followers of Christ we are confronted with the Great Commission to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, failure to carry out this calling confronts us with the same question: "Why are you standing around looking into the sky?"

We might tout airtight theology and offer inspiring church services, but if we're not fulfilling the Great Commission, then we're just stargazers. As the old cliché reminds us: "We can be so heavenly minded that we're of no earthly good."

God wants change agents—fully committed disciples who will reach lost people and then teach them to obey *everything* Jesus commanded.

This lesson provides the ideal story to challenge your students to throw themselves into a cause bigger than themselves. Use this opportunity to inspire your class to respond to Jesus' invitation to share the gospel with the world.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Hear the story of Jesus' ascension and the parting challenge He gave to His followers. *(Know)*
- Sense God's calling to share the gospel with friends who are far from God. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to respond to the Great Commission. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Remnant and Its Mission, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 13: "The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)"

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.*

Or use this as an alternate activity: Invite your students to imagine the ascension of Christ. While their eyes are closed, read Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:9-12. Give them a minute of silence to envision the scene. Then ask them to share how they think they would have responded to the experience of witnessing the ascension of Jesus.

Illustration

Kevin Miller, former editor and executive vice president of *Christianity Today*, contrasts two space missions. Miller recounts the catastrophe in January of 1967. There was a launchpad test of *Apollo 1*, which was to be the first flight of a three-man *Apollo* capsule into earth's orbit. Experts surmise (although there is still debate over exactly what happened) that somewhere in the capsule's 31 miles of wiring, a wire had been stripped of its insulation. A bare wire that happened to be near a cooling line caused a violent chemical reaction between the silver in the wire and the ethylene glycol. Flames spread across the cabin ceiling. At 6:31 p.m. astronaut Roger Chaffee said: "We've got fire in the cockpit." A few seconds later, the transmission ended with a cry of pain. All three astronauts died.

Two years later, when *Apollo 11* got ready to carry human beings to the moon, U.S. President Nixon asked William Safire to write a speech entitled "In Event of Moon Disaster." If anything went wrong on the moon mission, Nixon would read the speech on TV, the radio communi-cations with the moon would be cut off, the astronauts would be left alone to die, and a minister would commend their souls to "the deepest of the deep."

Fortunately, that's not what happened. On July 20, 1969, with less than 30 seconds of fuel left, the lunar module landed in the Sea of Tranquility, and Commander Neil A. Armstrong stepped off the ladder onto the gray, powdery surface of the moon. It was the first time a human had ever gone to another celestial body.

After their return to earth, the astronauts had parades and dinners held in their honor in Washington, D.C. President Nixon gave each astronaut the Presidential Medal of Freedom. What a celebration! The human race had just accomplished its greatest technological achievement of all time.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Use the following transition from Kevin Miller to bridge the story and the lesson:

When Jesus Christ accomplished the greatest act of love and redemption of all time—when He went through the clouds to heaven's shores—what a celebration! Jesus had just completed the most dangerous and most important mission of all time. He had faced every temptation but never gave in to sin. He stood up to the intense hatred of people with only truth and love. He willingly obeyed God and fulfilled His mission of giving up His life as a sacrifice to bring people back to God. He defeated the devil. He destroyed death. Now He's returned in victory.

Why do we celebrate the Ascension? Because all heaven celebrates the victorious return of the Son, the Lamb who was slain, the Lion who conquered, the One who says in joy and power: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."[1]

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.*

Matthew 28:16-20

- Do you think seeing the resurrected Jesus changed the opinions that the disciples held about Him and His mission to this earth? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Notice how some of the disciples "worshipped" Jesus but "some doubted." Had you been one of the disciples that day, which camp do you think you would have been in? Explain.
- Have each student write a contemporary translation of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20).

Luke 24:50-53

- Compare the disciples' reaction to the Ascension with the feelings and emotions of the two people on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-27). What is the difference between the absence caused by the Crucifixion and the absence caused by the Ascension?
- How does the Ascension impact a Christian's worldview?
- Compare and contrast the worship described in this passage with the worship described in Matthew 28:17.

Acts 1:9-12

Ellen White offers this description of the scene: "While the disciples were still gazing upward, voices addressed them which sounded like richest music. They turned, and saw two angels in the form of men. . . .

"These angels were of the company that had been waiting in a shining cloud to escort Jesus to His heavenly home. The most exalted of the angel throng, they were the two who had come to the tomb at Christ's resurrection, and they had been with Him throughout His life on earth. With eager desire all heaven had waited for the end of His tarrying in a world marred by the curse of sin. The time had now come for the heavenly universe to receive their King. Did not the two angels long to join the throng that welcomed Jesus? But in sympathy and love for those whom He had left, they waited to give them comfort" (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 831, 832).

- In what ways might we be indicted for standing around, looking up into the sky?
- How does God comfort us when we long to be in the presence of our ascended Lord?

Sharing Context and Background

Matthew 28:16-20—Last words are very important. If someone is dying or leaving us, they're not likely to sign off with trivial small talk. In the case of Jesus, He departed this earth with very important words of instruction for His followers. Jesus made it clear that His followers were under His authority; they were to make more disciples; they were to baptize and teach these new followers to obey Jesus; and in case there were any doubts, Jesus would be with them until the end. In previous missions Jesus sent His disciples to preach His message to the Jews (Matthew 10:5, 6), but now His mission knew no bounds. Jesus died to redeem people from all nations.

Luke 24:50-53—Except for Mark's brief description of the Ascension (Mark 16:19), only Luke (here and in Acts 1:8-12) mentions this incident. He alone records the time (Acts 1:3) and the place (Luke 24:50) of the event.

This story makes a fitting conclusion to Luke's Gospel because it contains strong components of both the physical and spiritual realities of Jesus.

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.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Increasing Class Participation

Ever feel like your students have checked out in Sabbath School class? Teacher Dr. Mike Wong offers these simple suggestions for improving student engagement:

- **Ask better questions.** Consider asking questions that promote deeper thinking, rather than generic questions, such as "Are you following this?" For example, ask, "How would you explain this idea to a non-Christian friend?"
- **Use activities.** Consider assigning in-class problem solving to pairs, small groups, or the whole class, and then walk around the classroom to help.
- **Encourage students to take responsibility for learning.** Make it clear from the outset why the lesson is relevant and how they will benefit if they remain engaged.

—Adapted from www.depts.washington.edu/next/storyID_08953.php.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke portrays Jesus as the supreme example of a life lived perfectly in harmony with God's plan—as a child living in obedience to His parents and yet startling the religious leaders in the Temple with His knowledge; then as an adult serving God and others through teaching and healing; finally, as a sacrifice for sin without complaint.

This emphasis was well suited to the Greek audience that Luke was addressing. The Greeks put a high value on being an example and improving oneself, and were often engaged in conversations about perfection. The Greeks, however, struggled to reconcile the spiritual importance of the physical world. They believed the spiritual was more important than the physical. To help them understand the God-man who perfectly combined the physical and the spiritual worlds, Luke emphasized that Jesus was not a phantom spirit but a real live human being who addressed both the physical and the spiritual needs of the people He came to serve.

Acts 1:9-12—After 40 days with His disciples (Acts 1:3), Jesus returned to heaven. The two men, or angels, made it clear that Jesus would return the same way in which He left—visibly and in bodily form. We know He is coming again; there is no reason to be caught unaware (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Have each student spend time alone in prayer. The prayer should focus around the simple question: "God, how can I fulfill the Great Commission this week?" Allow enough time for students to wait in silence for impressions from God. You can discuss the experience in the larger group if you wish; or simply have students leave when they are done.

Summary

The bottom line is this: Jesus called us to be change agents, not stargazers. Can we change the world for Christ? We *must* at least try. We must go—whether that means across the street or across the ocean—and make disciples. This was not a suggestion; it was a direct command from our risen Savior! As we go, take comfort in knowing that Jesus is always with us.

[1] Kevin Miller, as posted at the subscription resource at www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/weekly/07-07-30/2073007.html.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages (*or *Humble Hero*), chapters 86, 87.

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: Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapters 86; 87.

calling change agents



Photo by Barin Von Foregger

keytext

"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 . . . will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'"

(Acts 1:10, 11, NIV)

flashlight

"Christ had sojourned in the world for thirty-three years; He had endured its scorn, insult, and mockery; He had been rejected and crucified. Now, when about to ascend to His throne of glory,—as He reviews the ingratitude of the people He came to save,—will He not withdraw from them His sympathy and love? Will not His affections be centered upon that realm where He is appreciated, and where sinless angels wait to do His bidding? No; His promise to those loved ones whom He leaves on earth is, 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world'" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 830).

what do you think?

Are you a good follower? Or do you tend to be more of a leader? Rank yourself from 1 ("That's not me at all") to 10 ("That is totally me") after the following statements:

_____ I lean on God for everything.
_____ My friends tell me I'm really good at following directions.
_____ If I sense God is calling me to do something I do it without hesitation.
_____ I ask my parents or other adults for advice.
_____ I believe that God makes His will known through His Spirit.
_____ I'm content to be a support person on a team.
_____ I prefer one-on-one mentoring to being in front of a big crowd of people.
_____ I believe the kingdom of God gets built through personal relationships—one friend at a time.
_____ I never worry about anything.
_____ I prefer singing in a choir rather than singing a solo.

did you know?

According to a site on friend-ship evangelism, polls suggest that approximately 90 percent of converts come to faith because they were invited by a "relative, friend, or neighbor."

INTO THE STORY

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

"When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."

"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.'"

(Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Matthew 28:16-20

Notice that before Jesus challenges His disciples with the Great Commission, He reminds them that all authority has been given to Him (verse 18). Why do you think He did this?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Why do you think Jesus reminded His disciples that He would always be with them?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Acts 1:9-12

What attitude do you sense in the angels' question "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?"

a. Sympathy c. Sincerity
b. Curiosity d. All of the above

Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Luke 24:51, 52

Would you characterize this passage as positive or negative? Why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

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

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

"This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world" **(1 John 5:3, 4, NIV).**

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight" **(Proverbs 3:5, 6, NIV).**

"You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance" **(Psalm 32:7, NIV).**

further insight

"He teaches us to look upon every needy soul as our brother, and the world as our field."

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 823

Sabbath

Read Isaiah 43:10.

Add up your points from the *What Do You Think?* section to discover your "Follower Quotient." Use this key:

0-20 points = You are a leader, not a follower.
21-40 points = You tend to lead rather than follow.
41-60 points = You are comfortable leading or following.
61-80 points = You lean toward following.
81-100 points = You are a gifted team player, supporter, and follower.

Compare your score with the score of friends in your Sabbath School class. Discuss the following questions:

How might you sense God calling you to help build the kingdom of God as a leader? a follower?

_____
_____
_____

Do you tend to be a change agent?

_____
_____
_____

Review the instructions that Jesus gave to His followers at His ascension. How can you make His calling personal and follow those directions today?

_____
_____
_____

Sunday

Read Revelation 2:10.

Read the sections *Into the Story* and *Out of the Story*. If we are to accept the challenge that Jesus gave His followers as He ascended to heaven, would our message be charming? popular? offensive? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

Monday

Read Acts 1:9-11.

Compare the *Key Text* with this quotation from Ellen White: "God is not partial. All who are made partakers of His salvation here, and who hope to share the glories of the kingdom hereafter, must gather with Christ. Each must feel that he is responsible for his own case, and for the influence he exerts over others" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 179).

Ask yourself:

- What influence do I exert over others?
- What does it mean to "gather with Christ"?
- Do I understand that I am responsible for my own case? What does that look like in my life?

Tuesday

Read 1 John 5:3, 4.

Read this week's *Flashlight.* Escape to a quiet place and reflect on God's love for you.

Wednesday

Read the verses in *Punch Lines*. Dig deeper into God's Word by reading these additional texts:

- Matthew 5:14-16
- Mark 1:17
- Acts 1:8
- 2 Timothy 4:1-8
- Luke 9:23-27

Thursday

Read Proverbs 3:5, 6.

At Jesus' ascension, the two men dressed in white asked the disciples, "Why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky?" (Acts 1:11, *The Message*). In other words: "Are you going to be a stargazer or a change agent?" Jesus asks you to choose being a witness for Him today. How will you answer?

_____
_____
_____

Friday

Read Psalm 32:7.

Ellen White writes: "When Christ ascended to heaven, the sense of His presence was still with His followers. It was a personal presence, full of love and light. Jesus, the Saviour, 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 still upon His lips, been taken up from them into heaven, and the tones of His voice had come back to them, as the cloud of angels received Him—'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Matthew 28:20. . . . They knew that He had ascended to heaven to prepare places for them, and that He would come again and take them to Himself" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 73).

Do you enjoy the sense of Christ's personal presence? If so, in what ways? How will you respond to His call to a consistent relationship with Him?

_____
_____
_____

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages or (*Humble Hero*), chapters 86; 87.

*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.