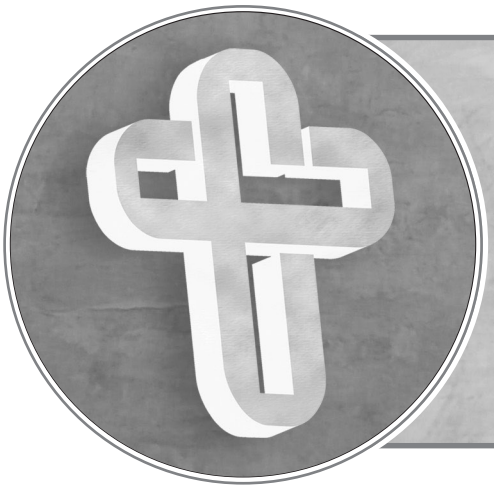


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JANUARY 03 2026

last words and witnesses

Scripture Story: Acts 1:1-11.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 1-3.
Key Text: Acts 1:7, 8.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

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

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

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

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

II. TARGET

The students will:

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

III. EXPLORE

Unity in the Body of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 14

The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children (Ps. 133:1; Matt. 28:19, 20; John 17:20-23; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12-14; 2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Gal. 3:27-29; Eph. 2:13-16; 4:3-6, 11-16; Col. 3:10-15).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

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

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

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"Every book has a central theme. The central theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ. It is the story of the perfect world He created, sin's rebellion, the consequences of disobedience, and the efforts of a loving God desperate to save His lost children. The Bible is the story of Jesus plunging into the arena of human affairs to save a people who could not save themselves. In a world of self-centeredness, Jesus revealed the selfless love of God. In a world that did not love Him, Jesus loved unconditionally. 'God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8, NKJV). . . .

"During [the It Is Written] meetings in Madras, India, one of the local Bible instructors asked to be assigned to the worst area in town—a barrio known for its gangs, thieves, drugs, and drunkenness. One day while she was visiting people in that area, Jesus came face to face with the local gang leader. The gang leader confronted her and said, 'Old woman, get out of here with your Jesus.'

" 'Young man,' she replied, 'tell me why you don't love Him as I do.' The gang leader began to curse and yell. She patiently listened. When he calmed down, she told him about the Jesus who changed her life. The Jesus who filled her heart with love and joy and peace. The tough, hardened gang leader began to weep. 'Old woman, please come with me to all the gang members in this barrio to tell them about the love of Jesus too.'

"The Christ of Scripture transformed this doubter's heart. There is a love that flows from the pages of Scripture that changes our lives also. There is nothing we can do to change God's love for us. All of our sins will not keep Him from loving us.

"The Bible speaks to us of a love so amazing, so incredible, so unparalleled, so matchless, so awesome that, if we let it, that love will change our lives" (Mark Finley, *Solid Ground*, p. 16).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

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

Out of the Story for Teachers

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

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

a "witness" and what they were to bear witness to?

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

Extra Questions for Teachers:

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

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

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

Sharing Context and Background

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

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

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

1. The disciples must experience the reality of the Resurrection (Acts 1:3). The reality of our salvation rests on whether Jesus truly was raised from the

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Molding by Modeling

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

cornerstoneconnections

Teaching From the Lesson

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite 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 Acts of the Apostles. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke 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.*

dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-40). The theme of the New Testament church is the resurrection of Christ. Calvary was key, but Christ overcoming death is the theme of the book of Acts.

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

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

The sequence of going to Jerusalem first, then to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth mirrors a natural course for the church today. One of the tasks of this lesson is to get students to visualize what that might look like today.

III. CLOSING

Activity

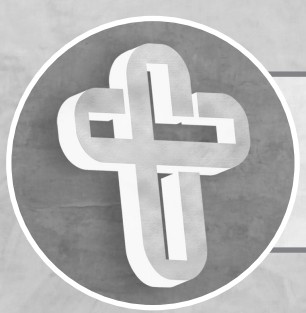
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

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

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

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



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 1-3.

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STUDENT LESSON

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

keytext

"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)

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).

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?

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_____
_____

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

_____
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_____

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?

_____
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_____
_____
_____

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

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#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.