CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

APRIL252026

Scripture Story: Acts 20:4–23:35.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 37, 38.

that's my story



Photo by Alden Ho

flashlight

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

keytext

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

(Acts 22:14-16)

what do you think?

What kinds of personal stories are most compelling and inspiring to you? Why?

Rank the following in order of their impact on you:

___ from rags to riches
___ from sinful to holy living
___ from ignorance to understanding
___ from pride to humility
___ from being a selfish oppressor to a selfless liberator
___ from being unnoticed to famous

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

_____
_____
_____

did you know?

Did you know that top business executives understand the power of our life's story and its effect on business?

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



INTO THE STORY

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Acts 21:40—22:16)

OUT OF THE STORY

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

_____
_____
_____

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

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

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

_____
_____

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

_____
_____

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

_____
_____

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

_____
_____

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

_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

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

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

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

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

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

further insight

"The minister of Christ is not to present to the people only those truths that are the most pleasing, while he withholds others that might cause them pain."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 394

Sabbath

Read 2 Peter 1:16.

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

Sunday

Read Job 19:25-27.

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

- Resolved
- Stubborn
- Fearless
- Hopeful
- Humbled
- Defeated

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

Monday

Read Acts 22:14-16.

The *Key Text* to memorize this week comes from Acts 22:14-16, in which Paul retells what God said through the faithful servant Ananias. Read this message several times and rewrite the message in your own words as you think God would say them to you. Think of the possibilities that God may have planned for your life. If you were called upon to tell your story, what would you say about Christ and your devotion to Him?

Tuesday

Read 1 John 1:2, 3.

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

Wednesday

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

Thursday

Read Revelation 12:10, 11.

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

Friday

Read Acts 4:18-20.

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

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 37, 38.

**Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles,* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.