CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
JUNE 27 2026

# like light

**Scripture Story:** Matthew 16:18; Revelation 7:9-17; Ephesians 2:19-22.
**Commentary:** *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 58.
**Key Text:** Ephesians 2:19-21.

## PREPARING TO TEACH

### I. SYNOPSIS

This final chapter in *The Acts of the Apostles* offers an inspiring call to carry on the legacy of spiritual heroes. Ellen White writes:

"The enemy of righteousness left nothing undone in his effort to stop the work committed to the Lord's builders. But God 'left not himself without witness.' Acts 14:17. Workers were raised up who ably defended the faith once delivered to the saints. History bears record to the fortitude and heroism of these men. Like the apostles, many of them fell at their post, but the building of the temple went steadily forward. The workmen were slain, but the work advanced. The Waldenses, John Wycliffe, Huss and Jerome, Martin Luther and Zwingli, Cranmer, Latimer, and Knox, the Huguenots, John and Charles Wesley, and a host of others brought to the foundation material that will endure throughout eternity" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 598).

This lesson provides an ideal chance to challenge your youth group to give their lives for a cause that will endure throughout eternity. Use this opportunity to inspire the young people to leverage their lives and employ their spiritual gifts to build the kingdom of God.

Regardless of temperament, every person in your youth group is called to be a witness. God wants every one to be active in evangelism—regardless of someone's personality type. Thus, the primary objective of this lesson is to help erase stereotypes we might have of evangelists and inspire every student to be an ambassador for Jesus.

### II. TARGET

The students will:

- Consider the wide scope of evangelism. *(Know)*
- Sense the heart of Christ for His wayward children. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to get involved in building the kingdom of God. *(Respond)*

### III. EXPLORE

**Spiritual Gifts and Ministries, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 17**

"God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people. Some members are called of God and endowed by the Spirit for functions recognized by the church in pastoral, evangelistic, and teaching ministries particularly needed to equip the members for service, to build up the church to spiritual maturity, and to foster unity of the faith and knowledge of God. When members employ these spiritual gifts as faithful stewards of God's varied grace, the church is protected from the destructive influence of false doctrine, grows with a growth that is from God, and is built

up in faith and love" (Acts 6:1-7; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27, 28; Eph. 4:8, 11-16; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Peter 4:10, 11).

# 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 an alternate activity, read Matthew 5:14-16. Unpack the passage with your students by listing their answers on a whiteboard.*

- What are some examples of light that glares? Share some negative illustrations of light that can be blinding and destructive.
- What are some examples of light that glows? Share some positive illustrations of light that can be glowing and productive.
- Now think about the statement of Jesus: "You are the light of the world." Can you think of examples in which that "light" has been glaring and overwhelming, i.e., damaging to the work of God? Can you think of examples in which that light has been glowing, i.e., a warm and inviting light for God's kingdom? How can we be God's witnesses without turning people off or offending them?

## II. TEACHING THE STORY

### *Illustration*

"On May 7, 1824, a gifted composer conducted the first performance of his Ninth Symphony in a Viennese theater. The crowded auditorium received the program with enthusiasm. This man seemed to put so much emotion in his music, so much that was passionate and heroic. At the end of one movement the audience broke into thunderous applause. But the conductor just stood there . . . calmly turning the pages of his score. Finally the contralto on the stage had to pull him by the sleeve and point him to the audience. Only then did Ludwig van Beethoven, totally deaf, turn and bow.

"He could not hear any of the clapping, and he could not hear a note that he was conducting. But the whole symphony was there in his head, and he was giving it dramatic, glorious expression.

"Beethoven had good reason to enjoy that unforgettable evening. In a way, he had been composing against his past, turning ugliness and disappointment into something beautiful. . . .

"Beethoven had plenty of opportunity for anger and resentment, yet he found a way to express his feelings positively. Expressing the deepest parts of himself, he turned his life experience into a gift.

"The God of heaven is fully capable of lighting up the darkness of our lives. The light of His love penetrates our moments of darkest despair. His light leads us out of darkness" (Mark Finley, *Solid Ground,* pp. 94, 95).

### *Bridge to the Story*

In our dark world that's scarred with terrorism, date rape, cancer, divorce, alcoholism, child abuse, and every conceivable kind of hate, God calls you to be a light.

What can you do? Whatever you can. Perhaps you can play your cello at the retirement home. Or serve soup at the homeless shelter. Or mix cement for Habitat for Humanity. In whatever way that God has wired you, leverage your gifts to build His kingdom.

### *Out of the Story for Teachers*

*After you read the* Into the Story *section with your students, use the following questions to explore the texts with them.*

**Matthew 16:18**

- How do you interpret the power given to Peter by Jesus?
- As you look at the church today, do you believe Jesus' prophecy that "the gates of hell will not prevail against it" is being fulfilled? Why or why not?
- The rock on which the church of Jesus is built has been identified as: (1) Jesus Christ and His work of salvation at Calvary; (2) Peter (the first leader at the church in Jerusalem); (3) the confession of faith that Peter gave and that all subsequent followers would give. Read 1 Peter 2:4-6 and Ephesians 2:19-22 and then explain which possible interpretation seems most plausible to you.

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

- Based solely on this text, how would you define the church?
- How does this text inform a Christ-follower's understanding of evangelism?

- What part does the individual play in the process of "being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit"?

**Revelation 7:9-17**

- What does this passage say about God's kingdom? Why do you think Ellen White chose this passage as one of those to conclude her book *The Acts of the Apostles*?
- "The great tribulation" has been explained to mean the suffering of believers through the ages; another explanation posits that it refers to a specific time of intense tribulation yet to come. Which interpretation do you believe is correct? Or could both explanations contain some truth? Explain.

### *Sharing Context and Background*

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

Why is it that 93 percent of Americans claim to believe in God but only 40 percent of Americans attend church? Many people love God; they just can't stand the church!

Now contrast the church today with the early Christian church.

Given the explosive, exponential growth of the early Christian church, it is no surprise that Acts 2:47 says that "people in general liked what they saw" (*The Message*). So what was it that nonbelievers saw in the church that they liked so much?

This growth makes sense when you consider the culture of the ancient world and how countercultural the church was in contrast. The church was unlike anything people had ever seen, and consequently people flooded into it to be a part of this radical new institution.

**1. The hierarchical culture**

First, the Roman culture was very hierarchical in ancient times. People were rigidly divided into classes. There was the Roman senate at the very top, then the equestrian class, then several other class distinctions until you got to the bottom of the ladder with slaves. Everything in the culture reinforced this caste system, and it was virtually impossible to improve your standing in life.

Then a new community emerged in which people followed the teaching of the Rabbi Jesus who destroyed the social ladder. He taught that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45, NKJV). The world had never seen anything like this.

**2. The culture of gender discrimination**

Furthermore, blatant discrimination against women was very common in the ancient world. But Jesus included women in His inner circle of friends. And His followers believed that "there is neither . . . male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NIV).

**3. The culture of marginalizing the poor and the sick**

Finally, the ancient world was a cruel place for the sick—but not in the church. Normally, sick people were cast off and left to die. But Jesus and His followers embraced the outcasts—even lepers (see Matthew 8:2, 3). There had never been a community like this.

Now is it any wonder that slaves, women, the



## Teaching From . . .

*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.*

### Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

*Making It Practical*

Good teaching *always* helps students to apply the concepts from the classroom in the real world. So be sure to make your teaching practical by helping students get a clear picture of how they can take the ideas of this lesson and apply them. For example, for this teaching you may brainstorm specific ways that your students can be the light of the world. Your list may look something like this:

1. Type out a prayer for a friend and e-mail it to them.
2. Post a Bible promise on your friend's locker.
3. Call a friend that you know is going through a hard time and just listen.
4. Bake some cookies for your neighbors.
5. Organize a singing band to visit a nursing home.
6. Pick up litter.
7. Collect canned food for a local food bank.

sick, the poor, and the disenfranchised all flocked to this new community called the church? If the church served others in the same way today as it did in the first century, do you suppose it would see the same growth? Why or why not?

## III. CLOSING

### *Activity*

*Close by introducing your young people to Joe Sixpack.*

Meet Joe Sixpack. He lives across the street from you. He attends the local high school and plays on their football team. He chews tobacco. He dates a girl who sports a tattoo on her ankle. Joe loves Big Macs, Dizzee Rascal, and fast cars. Joe's parents divorced when he was six. Now he lives with his mom and stepdad.

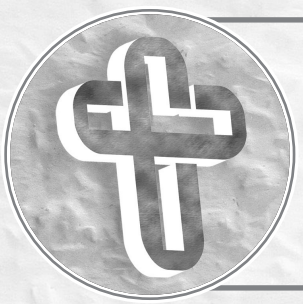
In Joe's mind, as long as we do good things, we don't have to belong to an organized religion. That's why Joe volunteers at the local homeless shelter. He figures the best kind of religion is the type that meets needs, not the kind that sits around in funny-looking buildings.

### *Summary*

*After describing Joe Sixpack above, discuss the following questions:*

1. Do you know anybody who reminds you of Joe?
2. Is it important to build friendships with non-Adventists like Joe? Do such friendships compromise or strengthen your faith?
3. Are Joe's opinions about God and church valid? Why or why not?
4. What would attract Joe to our church?
5. Would Jesus have us reach Joe? How?

After discussing these questions (and some you may wish to add), develop a master plan for reaching Joe Sixpack. You may wish to have a Friend Day on which you can invite an unchurched buddy to your Sabbath School. You may wish to plan a program designed to speak Joe's language. For example, you could invite a professional to speak, or invite Joe to your home and befriend him, or have a ski day. Whatever you do, don't ignore Joe. Joe matters to God.



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*), chapter 58.

LESSON 13

# CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

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# STUDENT LESSON

**Scripture Story:** Matthew 16:18; Revelation 7:9-17; Ephesians 2:19-22.
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## like light



Photo by Colleen Cahill

## keytext

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

**(Ephesians 2:19-21)**

## flashlight

"Christ has given to the church a sacred charge. Every member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that the Savior desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Savior's love. All heaven is waiting for men and women through whom God can reveal the power of Christianity" (*The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 600).

# what do you think?

**Write down every adjective that first comes to mind when** you hear the word "evangelist":

_____
_____

List the positive traits that come to mind when you think of an evangelist:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

# did you know?

**The church is not a build-**ing. It is not a worship service. The church is not a foundation with bricks. The church is a force tasked with the calling to shine light in a dark world. Simply put, the church is you and I. When we are serving, loving, giving, encouraging, helping others, and shining light—then we *are* the church! This means we are the only evangelists that Jesus has for His church.

In the first few centuries people understood Christ's vision for the church. Onlookers were amazed by the radical faith and grace that Christians showed toward all people—the sick, the poor, the marginalized. Thus, this radical group of believers had no name. They were simply called *ecclesia*. It means "assembly," because that is the church—it's an assembly of ordinary folk committed to shining the light of Jesus wherever they go.

# INTO THE STORY

**"And I tell you that you** are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'

"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?'

"I answered, 'Sir, you know.'

"And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them," nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.' "

**(Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 7:9-17, NIV)**

# OUT OF THE STORY

Read the passages in the *Into the Story* section.

*Underline* key words that you think capture the main ideas.

*Circle* any words or phrases that give you a sense of hope.

*Put a star* next to every word that refers to Jesus Christ.

What is the one big idea in each text?

Matthew 16:18 _____
_____

Revelation 7:9-17 _____
_____

Ephesians 2:19-22 _____
_____

What is the one major theme that emerges from the three texts?
_____
_____

Is there one message in the readings that relates to your life today? What is it?
_____
_____
_____

How does the thought that we are being "built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" change your view of "church"?
_____
_____
_____

How can you be light in a dark world this week?
_____
_____
_____

# punch lines

**"You're here to** be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven" **(Matthew 5:14-16, *The Message*).**

**"For I desire** mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" **(Hosea 6:6).**

**"Oh, give thanks** to the Lord! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples" **(1 Chronicles 16:8).**

**"You also, as** living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" **(1 Peter 2:5).**

**"Imitate me, just** as I also imitate Christ" **(1 Corinthians 11:1).**

# further insight

**"There is nothing that the Savior desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character."**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 600

## Sabbath

**Read Hosea 6:6.**

Review your ideas about evangelists in the *What Do You Think?* section. The Bible calls all of us to be evangelists.

To discover your unique witnessing style, answer the following questions. Then look for opportunities this week to witness in your own community.

## Sunday

**Read 1 Chronicles 16:8.**

Take the following quiz to determine your evangelistic style.

1. You're on the bus when a woman next to you starts asking about your church. Which approach are you most likely to take?
   a. Share a number of Bible texts to substantiate your beliefs.
   b. Invite the person to an evangelistic series that your home church is hosting.
   c. Confront the woman with truth.
   d. Offer to carry her heavy bags as you both get off the bus.
   e. Tell her how you became a Christian.

2. Your dad has never been a believer. What do you think the best approach would be to interest him in spiritual matters?
   a. Appeal to his intellect.
   b. Invite him to church.
   c. Explain to him that each of us have to decide whether we accept God's gift of salvation and ask him to make a decision.
   d. Introduce him to Jesus by the way you live.
   e. Share your personal testimony with him.

3. If you were teaching a class on how to be a contagious Christian, what approach would you emphasize?
   a. Knowing Bible texts to defend your beliefs.
   b. Building relationships with unbelievers so you feel comfortable inviting friends to an evangelistic series.
   c. Speaking the truth with conviction whenever the opportunity arises.
   d. Volunteering to serve the poor so that people see an evangelistic sermon in you.
   e. Knowing your own testimony so you can share it every chance you get.

*Scoring:* If you had mostly A's: You prefer "the intellectual style." You appeal to a person's reason. An example of this style is Paul (see Acts 17:17).

If you had mostly B's: You prefer "the invitational style." You invite others to hear an evangelist preach. An example of this style is the woman at the well (see John 4:28-30, 39).

If you had mostly C's: You prefer "the confrontational style." You confront people with the truth. An example of this style is Peter (see Acts 2:14).

If you had mostly D's: You prefer "the service style." You help others. An example of this style is Dorcas (see Acts 9:36).

If you had mostly E's: You prefer "the testimonial style." You simply tell others what Jesus has done for you. An example of this style is the demon-possessed man (see Mark 5:18, 19).

Depending on the situation, you might use all of these methods to reach out to people with God's message of love.

## Monday

**Read Ephesians 2:19-22.**

Review the *Key Text* and then consider this commentary on the passage from the *Life Application Bible:*

A church building is sometimes called God's house. In reality, God's household is not a building, but a group of people. He lives in us and shows Himself to a watching world through us.[1]

## Tuesday

**Read 1 Peter 2:5.**

Compare and contrast Ellen White's statement in the *Flashlight* section with this quotation:

"It is not merely the duty of the minister, but of every member of the church, to represent Christ to the world. They are to catch the rays of light from Jesus, and reflect them upon souls blinded by error and infatuated with false doctrines" (Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry*, p. 153).

## Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* for this week and circle the one that speaks most directly to you. Why is that text most meaningful to you right now?

## Thursday

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:1.**

Read chapter 58 in *The Acts of the Apostles* and pray that God will show you how to continue to build on the rich heritage of church leaders that have gone before you.

## Friday

**Read Matthew 5:14-16.**

Pray over this question: "God, how can I be the light of the world today?"

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[1] *Life Application Bible,* New International Version (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), p. 2134.

## this week's reading*

*The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 58.

**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.