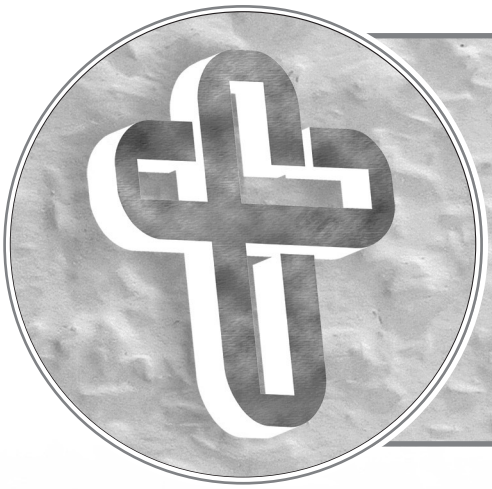


CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
APRIL 25 2026

that's my story

Scripture Story: Acts 20:4–23:35.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 37, 38.
Key Text: Acts 22:14-16.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Paul's final days were ahead of him and even though the religious leaders at Jerusalem were looking to arrest him, he longed to share with the believers what God was doing on behalf of the gospel. He also wanted to present to them the generous offering from the Gentile believers all over the world. This week's lesson is about Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, where he voluntarily turned himself in. This act had been prophesied by the prophet Agabus when "he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles"'" (Acts 21:11, NASB). Upon his arrival the news spread, and the authorities came to arrest him. It is at that time that Paul asked for permission to speak to the crowd and when he did, he simply told the story of his conversion experience.

The lesson for young people today is modeled by Paul as he tells his conversion story. One of the great failings of the religious leaders of that day, and perhaps the same is true today, was that they could not imagine their religious traditions changing. Ellen White observed that "these men had lost sight of the fact that God is the teacher of His people; that every worker in His cause is to obtain an individual experience in following the divine Leader" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 401). This week we need to challenge young people to obtain this personal encounter with God so their story might indeed affect the world as did Paul's.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Deepen their understanding of the importance of personal experience. *(Know)*
- Sense a responsibility to testify. *(Feel)*
- Determine to encounter God with genuine devotion and live to tell about it. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Nature of Humanity, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 7

"Man and woman were made in the image of God with individuality, the power and freedom to think and to do. Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else. When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences. They are born with weaknesses and tendencies to evil. But God in Christ reconciled the world to Himself and by His Spirit restores in penitent mortals the image of their Maker. Created for the glory of God, they are called to love Him and one another, and to care for their environment" (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 15; 3; Ps. 8:4-8; 51:5, 10; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Acts 17:24-28; Rom. 5:12-17; 2 Cor. 5:19, 20; Eph. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 3:4; 4:7, 8, 11, 20).

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 appropriate options. You may have students pencil in an example or illustration of each type of transformation story. You might invite the students to share what their first choice was or name each sample given and ask, "How many of you chose this as your first choice?" Always invite the students to explain their response and affirm their answers in order to foster more discussion. The ultimate goal is to get students to talk about what kind of life change matters to them.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"Stanley Praimnath sat at his desk on the eighty-first floor of the South Tower of the World Trade Center. Suddenly the nose of a 767 jet filled the sky outside his window. He dropped the phone and dove under his desk. Steel shrieked against steel as the ceiling crashed down. Electrical wires sparked. Desks and filing cabinets hurtled across the room. Smoke poured in. Stanley started sobbing and then praying.

"People fled the building by the thousands. Horribly burned and profusely bleeding, they stumbled down darkened staircases.

"Brian Clark was running down from the eighty-fourth floor when he heard cries for help. It was Stanley, who had somehow managed to crawl through the rubble but was now trapped under a fallen wall.

"Brian pulled away charred debris and shattered doors. Finally he reached the desperate man. 'You have got to make it through the wall,' he yelled. 'I can't,' Stanley replied. 'You have to do this,' Brian shouted back. Stanley clawed his way until he was partly free, and Brian pulled him from the rubble. The two strangers hugged like brothers. When they finally got outside, with tears in his eyes Stanley looked at Brian and said, 'Keep in touch, because I owe you my life' " (Mark Finley, *Solid Ground,* pp. 30, 31).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

How would you have felt? What if someone neglected or purposely avoided helping you while having the power to save your life?

Paul felt so compelled to share the message of Christ to others that there was no way he was going to hold back the kind of knowledge that just might set someone free.

Stanley Praimnath represents people who might come to know the joy of salvation if someone would just declare it in a way that they can understand.

Paul had one moment to open his mouth and speak words that might help some understand and accept Christ. What would he say to the hostile crowd? How could his words penetrate the stiff-necked Jews in Jerusalem that stood in the way of the Christian movement?

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 verses leading up to this story in which 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" (Acts 22:12, NKJV). 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?
- To what degree do you think Paul's testimony had an impact on people?

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Compare and Contrast

There several ways to think about how things are related: (1) sequence/order (which comes first and what follows), (2) cause and effect, (3) how the parts relate to the whole, and (4) compare and contrast. A Venn diagram (relational circles) allows you to organize according to what is similar and what is different. This is helpful when you are comparing different events, perspectives, and concepts. Usually exercises such as this take effort, but students who negotiate through them appreciate being challenged to think. Try it yourself with the three stories of Paul's conversion (Acts 9; Acts 22; Acts 26) before you try it out on the students and see what you discover.

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

Extra Questions for Teachers:

- What impact do you think Paul's Saul-to-Paul story had on the crowd? Think about how crowds react together and how when you are alone you tend to think differently than you do in the masses. While Paul was arrested, to what degree do you think Paul planted seeds in the hearts of Jerusalem for the gospel?
- Who would you liken the hostile crowd of the Jews to in your world? Do any of your friends, neighbors, or people at your school hold prejudices toward the message of Christ?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: Acts 9; Acts 1; John 4; Revelation 12:14; 1 John 1:1-4.

Sharing Context and Background

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

This week's lesson picks up at a climax of events that build with ferocious momentum over the course of two and a half chapters. Paul is determined to take the offering to Jerusalem and tell the "headquarters" about the good news of the work. In Acts 20:7-12 there is the all-night prayer meeting and fellowship experience in which the boy falls out of the window and is brought back to life, followed by a sad farewell (Acts 20:17-38). In chapter 21 the thrust of Paul's desire to get to Jerusalem picks up speed, but warnings come from the prophet Agabus in dramatic prophetic fashion (Acts 21:7-14). Barclay notes that "when words were inadequate, they dramatized their message" (*The Daily Study Bible*, p. 154). (Examples of this can be found in Isaiah 20:3, 4; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Ezekiel 4; 1 Kings 11:29-31.) In spite of all the danger and woe from the surrounding churches, Paul makes his way to certain death at Jerusalem.

Why did the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem want

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.*

Paul dead? Paul's insistence that Gentiles be welcomed into the fellowship shook the foundations of Jewish Christians. It was hard enough to imagine that they crucified the Messiah, but to undermine their heritage was too much for many to bear.

Why did they arrest Paul?

For Paul, the lines between Jew and Greek (Gentile) were blurred, and the only distinction he made between people had to do with whether they believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, or not. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul says, "We were all baptized into one body" (NKJV), and to the church at Galatia Paul admonished: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NKJV). When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the Asian Jews claimed they had witnessed Paul taking Trophimus (an uncircumcised Gentile) into the Temple where no Gentile had been allowed to enter on pain of death. The people came and practically killed Paul by beating him until the authorities arrived and secured him. The people who were looking to arrest Paul found a reason, and that reason pivots on the primary problem of the church in the New Testament: how do Gentiles who come to believe in Christ fit in and relate to the church?

Paul's contrived arrest is almost as dubious as Christ's several years previous. Keep in mind that while Paul worked tirelessly for the Gentiles his heart had been with the Jewish people, and he simply longed for them to understand. In his mind, his own peril was not as important as the Jews fully surrendering their prejudices for the kingdom of Christ.

III. CLOSING

Activity

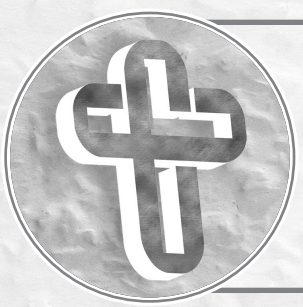
Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Divide the class into three groups and have each group read one of the three accounts of Paul's conversion (Acts 9; 22; 26). Ask: "What are the main features of the story—the most important details?" Gather the groups together and draw on a large piece of paper or a chalkboard three large overlapping circles. Leave a large portion where the circles overlap (this is where the groups will share common features of the story) and leave some room in each circle for unique parts of the story. Ask: "What are the events that are similar and what details are different?" Each story is told to an entirely different audience and while the basic story is the same, some elements are added or subtracted, probably for a reason. Invite the students to imagine what that reason is. You might even ask them to choose one of the stories they appreciate the most and why. Conclude by inviting them to begin thinking of their own story and what that would look like when delivered to different groups of people.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Even though Paul knew that the Jews were just waiting to pounce on him, he made his way to Jerusalem because he believed the cause of Christ was bigger than his own safety. The Jews who had come to Jerusalem to attend the feasts saw their heritage slipping away as many Gentiles became believers in Christ. The new era of Christianity ushered in and signaled the end of the old era of the Jews. Paul's arrest was primarily about this kind of prejudice, a quality that has no place in the church. But Paul knew that his story would sear in their memory more than any argument he could construct, so he elected to quiet the crowd and speak directly about the experience of transforming from Saul to Paul. If you are called upon to speak, what experience would you relate? What story of God's direction and grace would you deliver? Do you know Christ in such a way that you too, like Paul, have a story to tell?



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 37, 38.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

APRIL252026

STUDENT LESSON

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

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)

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).

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

connectingtolife

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.