

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

AUGUST 15 2026

commitment under fire

Scripture Story: Romans 1:8-17.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 13, 14.
Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Often the problems that get us down are far worse than just a grumpy morning. Maybe someone's mom was diagnosed with cancer and isn't expected to live through the year. The solution is not to subscribe to a clichéd faith that says, "It's OK, we'll just keep praising God and pretend that the cancer isn't real."

That's not what Paul and Silas were doing in Acts 16:16-40. Locked in a jail cell, they didn't pretend that they were in the Ritz Carlton, eating ice cream by the pool. Instead of pretending their circumstances did not exist, they chose to acknowledge that it did—but first they acknowledged God's power—a power that is more loving, more wise, and much greater than themselves or their challenging circumstances.

In Romans 8:28 God assures us that everything that happens to us happens for a greater, more divine purpose. Perhaps our circumstances are a training ground for our characters. Maybe because of what we went through someone close to us is finally able to trust in God and take that step to accept Him as their Savior. And, in many ways, because our personal pain makes us more empathetic toward others in similar situations, we become more effective sources of comfort and strength.

Through it all, it is crucial to remember that we serve a God who has infinite understanding, who is running the whole universe, who works all things according to His will, and who searches out all things and knows all things.

Our situation might stink, but it doesn't change the fact that God is still God.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand that being a Christian is not without challenges. *(Know)*
- Realize that God uses our difficult circumstances in order to mold our characters and make us better people. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to use their own experiences in order to help others in similar situations. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Son, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 4

"God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly human, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to heaven to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things" (Isa. 53:4-6; Dan. 9:25-27; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-3, 14; 5:22; 10:30; 14:1-3, 9, 13; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17-19; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-19; Heb. 2:9-18; 8:1, 2).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

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

(a) Those who live godly lives in Christ Jesus can expect to be persecuted. *True* (See 2 Timothy 3:12)

(b) King David asked God for permission to avenge those who persecuted him. *False* (see Psalm 31:15)

(c) The prophet Jeremiah understood that others rebuked him for God's glory. *True* (see Jeremiah 15:15)

(d) Jesus taught that whoever is persecuted for righteousness sake is blessed. *True* (see Matthew 5:10-12)

(e) As a result of persecution, the gospel was spread. *True* (see Acts 8:3, 4)

(f) Through a parable Christ explained that some believers would endure for a time, but when trouble comes, they fall away. *True* (see Mark 4:17)

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"As a captive in a foreign land, Daniel determined in his late teens to be true to God. Ushered into the luxurious banquet hall of the Babylonian king, he refused to worship the king's idols, drink the king's wine, or eat the king's unclean delicacies. Yet he did it with such grace that he eventually won the hearts of his captors.

Daniel's spiritual integrity continued throughout his life. When he was in his mid-80s, he faced perhaps his greatest test. Conniving coworkers schemed against him. They slyly influenced the king to pass a decree forbidding worship of any god except himself for 30 days. Obviously Daniel could not comply. The price for disobedience was high.

The prophet did not make his decision based on the consequences of his actions. He made it based on faithfulness to God's Word. Had he considered the consequences, death in the lions' den, he might have yielded. Being torn apart limb by limb by ferocious bloodthirsty lions is not a very pleasant thought. Anytime the consequences of a decision become the driving force in making a decision, we are likely to yield. . . .

The great heroes of faith all lived for a purpose. They stood above the masses. They viewed life from a different perspective. They did not live to please themselves or the crowd. The prime purpose of their life was to please God. In making this fundamental decision, Daniel lived a centered life. God's formula for true peace and lasting success is still the same today."—Mark Finley, *Solid Ground,* p. 206.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Praising God when our lives are going great may only cause people to ignore us. However, praising God even when our life is rotten makes people sit up and take notice. God is always working in our lives. Always. Often we cannot see the bigger picture, much less understand the reason behind what is happening to us. We can only see the problem; we can't see why we're stuck in the problem.

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.*

- *Circle* the characters or groups of people mentioned in this story. What have they done or are going to do?
- Are there any themes or goals that Paul keeps repeating? What are they?
- Share any aspects of the story that are new to you.
- Are there times in your life when you have felt weak and overwhelmed by your problems? What did you learn from those times?
- Do you have any friends who might be going through the same difficulties as you did? What would you say to them? What helped for you that you could you do the same to help them?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story:

Romans 8:28 (KJV): "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Interestingly enough, this verse is often misunderstood to mean either:

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Speaking the Truth in Love

(a) You can criticize a child's behavior, but never criticize the child.

(b) There's a difference between correcting the child and attacking the child. Never verbally put down your student.

(c) Be a "5-to-1" teacher. Every time you give your student a consequence for misbehavior, provide five opportunities for them to earn your praise or a reward.

(a) God will make everything turn out the way I want it to, or

(b) God causes everything to work out to have a happy ending on earth.

The truth is, we live in a sin-infested world. Perfection can be experienced only in heaven. When God promises it will all "work together for good," He means that while life can be painful and distasteful, when you look at the big picture, it all comes together in a purposeful way. Much like the ingredients of a cake, when eaten separately, can taste horrid. But beaten together and placed under extreme heat, after some time, the results can be delicious.

1 Peter 1:7 (NLT): "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world."

The Bible often uses the analogy of a metal refiner's fire that burns away impurities. If God did not exempt Jesus from suffering, then why would He exempt us? Jesus went through loneliness, rejection, criticism, and many other problems. Yet, the Bible says in Hebrews 5:8, 9 (NLT) that "even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him."

Sharing Context and Background

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

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary reveals that this letter to the Romans was written in Corinth during Paul's three-month stay there. He was returning to Palestine, carrying with him contributions for the poor from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Despite having preached at the great cities of Ephesus, Athens, and Corinth, Paul had yet to visit and proclaim the gospel in the capital city of the Roman Empire.

Rome was the capital city and travelers were constantly passing through on their way to other parts of

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 Great Controversy. *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.*

the empire. Perhaps that is how the message of Jesus Christ was "being reported all over the world."

In the book of Romans Paul shows that all humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike, have sinned and fallen short of God's ideal. But God Himself provided a remedy—the sacrifice of His Son. Paul develops the plan of salvation in the first part of the book, and in the latter half he deals with the practical application of the gospel.

The King James Version of Romans 1:17 uses the phrase "the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." Compare that structure with "from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18) and "from strength to strength" (Psalm 84:7). As faith is exercised we are able to receive more faith and so on . . . thus a victorious cycle is born.

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Cut card paper into bookmark size. Then, using ribbons or other craft materials that you can obtain, tell the students that they will be making their own bookmarks today. Have the students read the following verses:

Psalm 34:1
Psalm 16:8, 9
Psalm 90:1, 2

Let each of them pick which one they like the best, then, using markers and card paper, encourage them to write the verse onto the paper and then decorate and trim it. Encourage students to keep these in their Bibles or in their bedrooms and to pray their verses whenever they are having a difficult time focusing on God amid their problems.

Summary

Share the following story in your own words:

During China's Boxer Rebellion of 1900 insurgents captured a mission station, blocked all the gates but one, and in front of that one gate placed a cross flat on the ground. Then the word was passed to those inside that any who trampled the cross underfoot would be permitted their freedom and life, but that any refusing would be shot. Terribly frightened, the first seven students trampled the cross under their feet and were allowed to go free. But the eighth student, a young girl, refused to commit the sacrilegious act. Kneeling beside the cross in prayer for strength, she arose and moved carefully around the cross, and went out to face the firing squad. Strengthened by her example, every one of the remaining 92 students followed her to the firing squad.*

* Today in the Word, February 1989, p. 17.



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 Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 13, 14.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Romans 1:8-17.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 13, 14.

commitment under fire

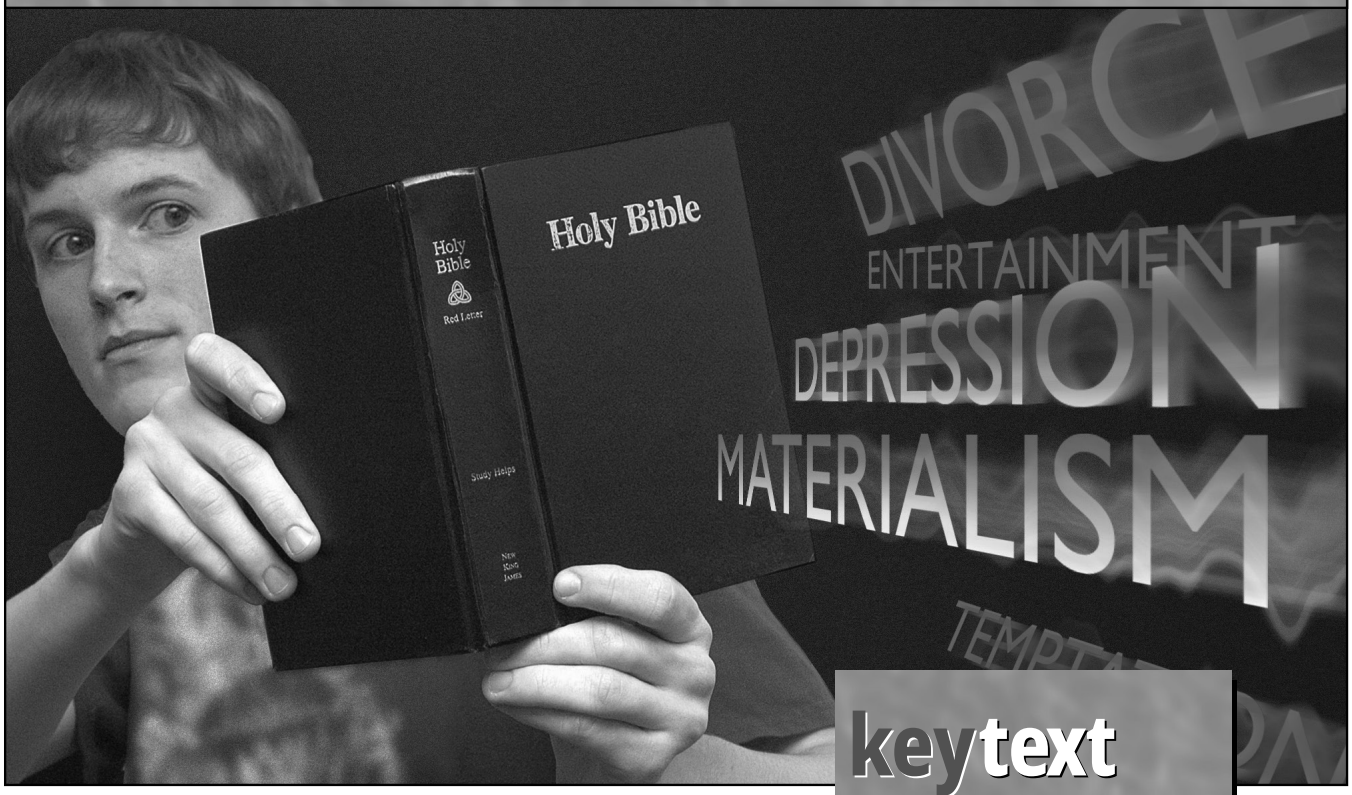


Photo by A Truman

flashlight

"The rage of the persecutors was equaled by the faith of the martyrs. Not only men but delicate women and young maidens displayed unflinching courage. 'Wives would take their stand by their husband's stake, and while he was enduring the fire they would whisper words of solace, or sing psalms to cheer him'" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 240).

keytext

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV)

what do you think?

Take the following true-false (T/F) quiz to test your knowledge about the persecution of Christians.

T / F Those who live godly lives in Christ Jesus can expect to be persecuted.

T / F King David asked God for permission to avenge those who persecuted him.

T / F The prophet Jeremiah understood that others rebuked him for God's glory.

T / F Jesus taught that whoever is persecuted for righteousness' sake is blessed.

T / F As a result of persecution, the gospel was spread.

T / F Through a parable Christ explained that some believers would endure for a time, but when trouble comes, they fall away.

did you know?

Even today, there are still places all over the world where people are killed or imprisoned for declaring themselves as Christ's followers. To many of us who are privileged to live in countries that do not persecute Christians, we don't necessarily think about our freedom as much as we probably should. We're just used to it. Often when we think of persecution, we conjure up images of burning stakes, lions, and the Amphitheatre. But no matter how foreign it all sounds, it's as real now in some countries as it was centuries ago. Whether it's a Chinese man who chooses to become a Christian, a North Korean who smuggles Bibles, or an African woman who takes care of her two nephews because their father and mother were martyred for their belief in Jesus Christ, Christians all over the world are jailed, murdered, and executed for their faith.

INTO THE STORY

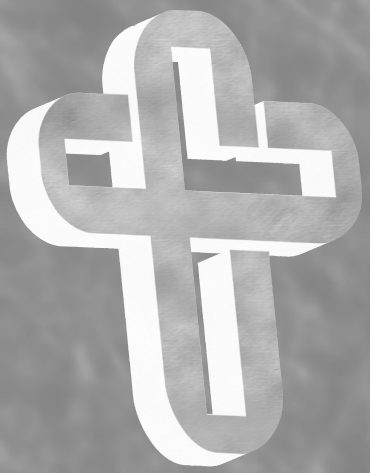
"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

"I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.

"I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

(Romans 1:8-17, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Who is Paul writing to? List the emotions that he feels toward them and why.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Do a bit of investigative work: Where was Paul when he wrote this passage? What was he doing? Does the setting add new insight or change any perspectives to his words?

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_____
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_____

Paul repeats the word "gospel" several times in this passage. *Circle* the word "gospel" each time it appears in the passage. What is the context each time it is mentioned?

_____
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How do spiritual gifts make us strong?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What is the power of the gospel that Paul speaks of? How is it at work in your life?

_____
_____
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_____

punch lines

"While he lived on earth, anticipating death, Jesus cried out in pain and wept in sorrow as he offered up priestly prayers to God. Because he honored God, God answered him. Though he was God's Son, he learned trusting-obedience by what he suffered, just as we do. Then, having arrived at the full stature of his maturity and having been announced by God as high priest in the order of Melchizedek, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who believingly obey him" **(Hebrews 5:7-10, *The Message*).**

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" **(Hebrews 11:8, NIV).**

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" **(James 1:2-4, NIV).**

"We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring" **(2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4, NIV).**

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" **(Romans 8:28, NIV).**

further insight

"God was with His people, and persecution could not prevail to silence their testimony."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 252.

Sabbath

Read James 1:2-4.

Sometimes your most profound and intimate experiences of God will be discovered during your darkest hours. All through the Bible, we find characters who, in times of trouble, reach out to the Lord in special ways. This is seen, for example, in many of the psalms, where the author would cry out to the Lord, seeking a deeper experience with Him during times of distress, pain, and suffering. Problems force us to look at God and depend on Him, instead of ourselves.

How has God used circumstances and trials in your life to bring growth and Christlikeness?

Sunday

Read Psalm 50:15.

Problems do not automatically make you a better person. Sadly, many people get bitter instead of better. The difference lies in the way they choose to respond to their problems, and our choices depend upon our walk with the Lord. If we make it a habit to be in communion with God daily, and if we make it a habit to think on Him, dwell on Him, and praise Him for His goodness, we will be much more inclined in times of distress to run to the Lord and learn from Him.

Think of a problem you are facing right now and ask yourself: "What does God want me to learn?"

Monday

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Notice how the Bible tells us to give thanks "in" all circumstances, not "for" all circumstances. This small difference in prepositions can make a big difference. No matter what problems you are facing, you can still be assured in His love, wisdom, care, power, and faithfulness. Think back on your past experiences; how did the problems get resolved? Can you see a way in which God was present through it all?

Tuesday

Read Matthew 5:14.

How is God using the Bible, the power of the Holy Spirit, and circumstances in your life to help you reach out to your friends and family for Christ? In what ways are you feeling convicted to tell others about Jesus and what He has done for you and what He has promised to all who accept Him? How can you be more willing to reach out to those who don't yet know the Lord?

Wednesday

As you read the passages listed in the *Punch Lines* section of this week's lesson, which verse strikes you as particularly significant today? Why do you think this verse is especially relevant to you? What circumstances are you facing that should cause you to lean more on the Lord and less on self or, in fact, anyone else?

Thursday

Read Matthew 25:35, 36.

How can your personal circumstances and life experiences be opportunities for you to serve God and others? That is, wherever you are, whatever situations arise, how can you be open to the leading of the Spirit to be a witness to others? Sometimes, even in the smallest and kindest acts, we can be a powerful witness for God. Think about even the "small" things you can do that could make a big impression on someone who might be searching for truth.

Friday

Read Romans 8:28.

God often allows certain struggles and hardships in our lives so that we can sympathize and minister to the same kind of needs in other people's lives. In what ways has God comforted you that would enable you to comfort others? What have you been through, and what have you learned in your trials that could help someone else going through something similar?

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire*), chapters 13, 14.

**Love Under Fire* is a special adaptation of *The Great Controversy*, 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.