CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
AUGUST 08 2026

swimming upstream

Scripture Story: Acts 5:25-42.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 11, 12.
Key Text: Acts 5:29.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Peer pressure is a challenge for every teen growing up. Parents try to teach their children to stand up to it and to do what they feel is right in the face of public opinion. Peer pressure doesn't stop after high school. All through their adult lives they will face pressure from their peers to act or do things a certain way. However, we fail to recognize the positive effects of peer pressure.

Peer pressure is unavoidable. Regardless of whom you spend time with, you will find yourself influenced to behave a certain way in order to be fully accepted by the group. The trick is to decide what you want out of life and then find people who have similar goals.

This is why God gave us a church. The early Christians just after Jesus' death and even the Christians of the Reformation found a great deal of comfort in the church. Fellow believers could encourage and strengthen each other during difficult times.

In fact, God created us to need companionship. Adam was not happy alone, and when God created Eve he felt complete. We were created with a need for each other. While our need for companionship and group support can be our weakness when we turn to the wrong people, it can also be our strength when we turn to God's church. Yet regardless of choosing fellow believers to spend time with and to gain support from, we must always turn first to God.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the pressure they feel in fitting in with a group. *(Know)*
- Sense their responsibility toward choosing a support group that will encourage them to have the life that they dream of. *(Feel)*
- Choose to make use of some of the support networks that God provides such as church and family. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Church, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 12

"The church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for worship, for fellowship, for instruction in the Word, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to humanity, and for the worldwide proclamation of the gospel. The church derives its authority from Christ, who is the incarnate Word revealed in the Scriptures. The church is God's family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish" (Gen. 12:1-3; Exod. 19:3-7; Matt. 16:13-20; 18:18; 28:19, 20; Acts

2:38-42; 7:38; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11; 5:23-27; Col. 1:17, 18; 1 Peter 2:9).

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.*

Bring enough party hats, plastic gloves, or pins with sayings on them for each member of the class. (The item is not important, only that it is something they can wear.) Tell the students that they should each put on one of the items, but if they really don't want to, that is all right. Then watch as they decide what to do.

After they have each made a decision, ask them these questions:

1. "Did what the other students choose affect your choice?"
2. "Did you change your mind on your choice after seeing someone else's choice?"
3. "Did the opinion of the other students matter to you?" Explain.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Ben Carson is a famous Adventist doctor known for many newsworthy operations. He's made a name for himself as a highly skilled surgeon. However, if you knew him as a boy, you wouldn't have thought he'd grow up to be anyone at all.

Ben's mother, Sonia, had dropped out of school when she was in third grade. She got married very young to a much older minister and found herself divorced eight years later with two boys to raise. She worked two or three jobs at a time to make ends meet, but Ben's family still lived in extreme poverty.

Ben wasn't very good at school, and eventually fell to the bottom of his class. He was picked on, and because of the bullying he developed a nasty temper.

So what turned him around? His mother. She started to expect things from him that no one else did. She made him limit his TV watching and finish his homework before going out to play, even though she could barely read the assignments that her son had written. Ben said, "It was at that moment I realized that I wasn't stupid."

Ben went on to become a world-renowned neural surgeon. He was the first to separate Siamese twins joined at the back of the head in 1987. He was also the first to insert an intrauterine shunt for a hydrocephalic twin, a brain surgery that he performed on a baby still in its mother's womb. Dr. Ben Carson certainly became a somebody!

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

The change in Ben's life was because his mother believed in him. She didn't let the kids at school have the last say. They said he was a loser. *She* said otherwise! When he spent less time with those kids and more time studying and listening to the positive things his mother had to say to him, he stopped being the kid at the bottom of the class and started being the future neural surgeon. Whom you spend time with matters!

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.*

- *Underline* the names of the individuals dealing with social pressure.
- How does each person deal with the pressure put on them?
- For each person, what is the "right thing" for them to do? Why?
- Why do you think that they make the choices they do?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: Luke 14:25-33; Psalm 109.

Sharing Context and Background

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

Jesus was not the first or the last man to claim to be the Messiah. There were many men who made that claim, which might have been part of why the Pharisees were so skeptical about Jesus. In this passage of Scripture Gamaliel, a well-respected Jewish teacher, stood up and reminded the rest of the Sanhedrin about other leaders who got the people excited, claiming to be the Messiah, and then fizzled out.

Flavius Josephus was a historian who wrote about

the time of Christ. He mentions Theudas, as well:

"It came to pass, while Fadus was procurator of Judea, that a certain charlatan, whose name was Theudas, persuaded a great part of the people to take their effects with them, and follow him to the river Jordan; for he told them he was a prophet, and that he would, by his own command, divide the river, and afford them an easy passage over it. Many were deluded by his words. However, Fadus did not permit them to make any advantage of his wild attempt, but sent a troop of horsemen out against them. After falling upon them unexpectedly, they slew many of them, and took many of them alive. They also took Theudas alive, cut off his head, and carried it to Jerusalem."[1]

Josephus also describes Judas the Galilean:

"There was one Judas, a Galilean, of a city whose name was Gamala, who, taking with him Zadok, a Pharisee, became zealous to draw them to a revolt. Both said that this taxation was no better than an introduction to slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty; as if they could procure them happiness and security for what they possessed, and an assured enjoyment of a still greater good, which was that of the honor and glory they would thereby acquire for magnanimity. They also said that God would not otherwise be assisting to them, than upon their joining with one another in such councils as might be successful, and for their own advantage; and this especially, if they would set about great exploits, and not grow weary in executing the same. So men received what they said with pleasure, and this bold attempt proceeded to a great height."[2]

Many men had made the same claims that Jesus did, and from an outside observer, the end results were the same: the man who claimed to be the Messiah was killed. But some things were different in the case of Jesus. First of all, His followers only gained strength after His death and did not fizzle out, and second, Jesus did not advocate a revolt.

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Critical Thinking Skills

Remember that teens are almost adults. Giving them the reins in their learning and allowing them some autonomy can be very beneficial. Allow them to question, draw their own conclusions, and grapple with issues without threat of punishment or disapproval for a "wrong answer."

Many teens, when they hit on a subject or field of knowledge that interests them, will absorb a shocking amount of information on the subject. Make use of this. If there is a student who indicates that they know something on the subject of which you are speaking, encourage them to contribute. This makes learning a team effort, and not a monarchy.

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.*

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Ask the students to give advice for a hypothetical younger teen who is just entering high school. What advice would they give on how to be true to their own beliefs and not be pushed around? What wisdom have the students gleaned from their adolescence so far?

Make a list of the answers at the front. Ask the students how successful they feel that they have been in staying true to their beliefs. Is there anything they would like to improve on in the future?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

We often think of peer pressure as a bad thing. Teens joke about the line "Come on, everybody's doing it!" Peer pressure is seen as one of the main reasons kids get into trouble. However, peer pressure can be a good thing if you have a positive influence on your peers or if they influence you to do the right thing.

Peer pressure is going to be a fact of life for the rest of your life. It will never stop. But when you know what you want out of life, everything gets easier! When you spend time with people who want the same things out of life, you are encouraged toward your goal. This is positive peer pressure. When you spend time with people who study, you tend to study more and your grades go up. When you spend time with people who love God, you are encouraged toward God and grow closer to Him.

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[1] Flavius Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 20. 97, 98.
[2] *Ibid.*,18. 4-6.



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 11, 12.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Acts 5:25-42.
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keytext

"Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than human beings!'"

(Acts 5:29, NIV)

flashlight

"The reformed princes had determined upon having a statement of their views in systematic form, with the evidence from the Scriptures, to present before the Diet; and the task of its preparation was committed to Luther, Melanchthon, and their associates. . . . The Reformers were solicitous that their cause should not be confounded with political questions; they felt that the Reformation should exercise no other influence than that which proceeds from the word of God" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 206).

what do you think?

Look at the situations below. For each one, decide whether it is appropriate to go with public opinion or with your personal belief.

- Most people you know think that a particular guy is creepy and possibly dangerous. You don't really see it. He asks you to get together with him one evening.
- You have been invited to a party. You are excited to go until you hear that alcohol may be served. All your friends say, "It's no big deal. Just don't drink any."
- You don't really like a particular style of music, but all of your friends love it. They want you to go along to a concert.
- A group of fellow students are angry at a teacher for giving them low grades. You like the teacher and think that they aren't being fair; however, they seem to feel very strongly about their position. Do you say something?

did you know?

The Bible's authority for faith and practice rises from its origin. Its writers viewed the Bible as distinct from other literature. They referred to it as 'Holy Scriptures' (Romans 1:2), 'sacred writings' (2 Timothy 3:15, RSV), and the 'oracles of God' (Romans 3:2; Hebrews 5:12).

The uniqueness of the Scriptures is based on their origin and source. The Bible writers claimed they did not originate their messages but received them from divine sources. It was through divine revelation that they were able 'to see' the truths they passed on (see Isaiah 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1; Jeremiah 38:21)" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe,* p. 13).

INTO THE STORY

"Just then someone showed up and said, 'Did you know that the men you put in jail are back in the Temple teaching the people?' The chief and his police went and got them, but they handled them gently, fearful that the people would riot and turn on them.

"Bringing them back, they stood them before the High Council. The Chief Priest said, 'Didn't we give you strict orders not to teach in Jesus' name? And here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are trying your best to blame us for the death of this man.'

"Peter and the apostles answered, 'It's necessary to obey God rather than men. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, the One you killed by hanging him on a cross. God set him on high at his side, Prince and Savior, to give Israel the gift of a changed life and sins forgiven.

And we are witnesses to these things. The Holy Spirit, whom God gives to those who obey him, corroborates every detail.'

"When they heard that, they were furious and wanted to kill them on the spot. But one of the council members stood up, a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel, a teacher of God's Law who was honored by everyone. He ordered the men taken out of the room for a short time, then said, 'Fellow Israelites, be careful what you do to these men. Not long ago Theudas made something of a splash, claiming to be somebody, and got about four hundred men to join him. He was killed, his followers dispersed, and nothing came of it. A little later, at the time of the census, Judas the Galilean appeared and acquired a following. He also fizzled out and the people following him were scattered to the four winds.

"'So I am telling you: Hands off these men! Let them alone. If this program or this work is merely human, it will fall apart, but if it is of God, there is nothing you can do about it—and you better not be found fighting against God!'

"That convinced them. They called the apostles back in. After giving them a thorough whipping, they warned them not to speak in Jesus' name and sent them off. The apostles went out of the High Council overjoyed because they had been given the honor of being dishonored on account of the Name. Every day they were in the Temple and homes, teaching and preaching Christ Jesus, not letting up for a minute."

(Acts 5:25-42, *The Message*)

OUT OF THE STORY

There is a lot of social pressure in this story. Both Peter and the Sanhedrin must deal with the opinions of the people. How do they deal differently?

Whose opinions matter most to the Sanhedrin? Whose opinions matter most to Peter and the apostles?

How does peer support give strength to either side of this conflict?

The Sanhedrin were *fearful* that the people would riot, so they handled the apostles "gently" How does fear keep us from obeying God? How can we combat fear?

Gamaliel stands up for Peter and the apostles. What is his argument? Do you agree with his point that groups of people, no matter how devoted to each other, are doomed to lose their bond if it isn't blessed by God?

punch lines

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" **(Genesis 2:18, NIV).**

"When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?'" **(Esther 4:12-14, NIV).**

"Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'" **(Matthew 12:49, 50, NIV).**

"A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" **(John 16:32, NIV).**

"God sets the lonely in families" **(Psalm 68:6, NIV).**

further insight

"These faithful men acknowledged an authority above that of earthly rulers."

—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 202

Sabbath

Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

Peer pressure isn't always a bad thing! Peer pressure can make people do good things that they wouldn't normally do as well as bad things. That is why God gave us a church. That's not to say that we should pressure each other, but the very fact that people around us hold certain values, do certain things, or talk a certain way rubs off on us. Everyone wants to belong, and we subtly change our behavior and manners in order to do so.

Make a list of four things that you would not normally do if it weren't for your church community or Christian friends encouraging you. How have these things affected your life for the better?

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Sunday

Read Acts 5:38, 39.

In the *Into the Story* section, Peter and the apostles are pressured to stop preaching about Jesus. Gamaliel stands up to the Sanhedrin (his peers) in support of Peter. He has an interesting argument. He cites other charismatic leaders who have had significant numbers of followers. Over time, the groups always fell apart. He claimed that if the leader were not of God, then the group did not have a chance! What groups are you a part of? Is God a part your group bond? If not, do you think that your group will remain united in the long term? Why or why not?

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Monday

Read Acts 5:29.

As children, we are told that obedience makes us good. We are supposed to obey our parents and other authority figures in order to gain praise and avoid discipline. Look up the word "obey" in a concordance. Look up some of the texts in your Bible. Who are we supposed to obey? When Peter was told to stop preaching, he declared that "We must obey God rather than men!" Have you ever had an experience where an authority figure was telling you to do something that you felt was wrong? How did you handle it? How do you wish you had handled it?

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Tuesday

Read Matthew 22:21.

In the *Flashlight* excerpt some reformed princes who had accepted the Protestant faith drew up a document describing their beliefs to be brought before the Diet (a committee of Catholic officials) to gain the right to worship as they believed they should. These were powerful men who could have mustered up armies to support their cause, but, they didn't. They refused to use violence, and they refused to get involved in political questions. They believed that the "Reformation should exercise no other influence than that which proceeds from the Word of God." They respected the existing authorities as much as they could but, ultimately, they obeyed God. In what ways can you show your support of the authority figures you encounter? Get some practice: How would you respectfully disagree with an authority figure in your life?

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Wednesday

Read Matthew 12:49, 50.

Make a list of the social groups that you belong to. You might list groups such as your family, your school, your church, or your job. Out of these groups, *place an X* beside the ones that you chose to belong to. How important are these social groups to you? Which group is the most important to you?

God created us with the need to belong with other people. Take a look at the *Punch Line* texts. Is belonging to the family of God a comfort to you? Why or why not?

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Thursday

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33; 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Since peer pressure can work in a positive way as well as a negative way, have you ever considered using it for your benefit? What kind of person do you dream of becoming? Do you want to be smart? successful? known for your kindness and compassion? Do you want to be someone spectacular? God created you with huge potential, but the people with whom you choose to surround yourself will affect what you become. Whom do you choose to spend time with? Is their influence positive or negative for your life?

Friday

Read Colossians 1:9, 10.

Going against popular opinion is never easy. Whose opinion matters the most to you in your life? Why? What do you gain by pleasing this person?

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire*), chapters 11, 12.

**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.