

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
JULY042026

a high price for faith

Scripture Story: Matthew 24; 2 Timothy 3:12.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 1, 2.
Key Text: Matthew 24:45, 46.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The early Christians faced nightmarish circumstances in order to stand for their faith. It is difficult to imagine having to endure such things, let alone being willing to endure them. However, these people found courage to face the worst. Their relationship with God was so strong that they were willing to be martyred rather than turn from their beliefs. A simple belief does not give that kind of courage. Because of a strong belief people have been willing to fight wars. They have been willing to kill people. But a belief does not give a person the courage to accept death without a fight. Only God can live in a person and turn a nightmare into a heroic stand.

In Matthew 24 the disciples asked Jesus what the signs of the end would be. Jesus answered them in a unique way. He told them a double prophecy. He warned them of the destruction of Jerusalem to come in A.D. 70. He also told them what the end times would be like. If He had told them about His horrific death, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end times all at once, they would not have been able to deal with it. Jesus told them what was important for them to know. They needed to be warned about the destruction of Jerusalem so that those who believed could escape before the catastrophe. They also needed to know what the signs of the end would be so that they could pass the information along. If they watched for the signs they would be safe, even though they would not know exactly what would happen. It is the same for us.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand why the early Christians were willing to face death for their faith. *(Know)*
- Sense the realness of God. *(Feel)*
- Choose to pursue a real and growing relationship with God. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Great Controversy, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 8

"All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the global flood, as presented in the historical account of Genesis 1-11. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation" (Gen. 3; 6-8; Job 1:6-12; Isa. 14:12-14; Ezek. 28:12-18; Rom. 1:19-32; 3:4; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:9; Heb. 1:14; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 3:6; Rev. 12:4-9).

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.*

Offer the students two hypothetical situations:

Situation 1: You see someone you love in a burning building. You know that if you run in to save them, you will likely die, but they will live. If you don't, they will die and you will live.

Situation 2: You are told that you will be killed unless you deny your belief in Jesus.

Which situation are they truthfully more inclined to die for? Why might this be? What makes us more willing to die for someone we love? What makes a relationship with Jesus less real than a relationship with another person on earth?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

It is impossible to genuinely love God without loving the people God brings into your life every day. When God places His love in our hearts, it overflows to the people around us.

Christian author Corrie ten Boom describes how this love flowed out of the life of her own mother. Mrs. ten Boom was the kind of person who lived to serve. Her hands were always busy knitting sweaters for orphans, baking bread for the homeless, or making birthday gifts. This woman was known and loved by people throughout her Dutch town of Haarlem.

But then a massive stroke left Mrs. ten Boom partially paralyzed. She could utter only three words, "yes," "no," and "Corrie." It appeared her deeds of love had come to an end.

This seemingly helpless woman, however, found a way to communicate. Every morning the ten Boom daughters sat their mother in a comfortable chair by the front window so she could watch the busy street outside. And she began to communicate. They began a system much like 20 questions.

When Mrs. ten Boom saw someone special, she called out, "Corrie!"

"What is it, Mama? Are you thinking of someone?"

Mother would reply with an enthusiastic "Yes." Then her daughter continued the questioning. Was it the person's birthday? Did the person seem to have some special need? Did they appear discouraged? Once Corrie had some idea of her mother's intentions, she wrote a note of encouragement and hope to the person her mother pointed out. Then she guided Mother's stiff fingers to sign her name.

For the last three years of her life, this woman sat at her window and continued ministering to the people outside. Not even paralysis could stop her service of love.

This kind of service of love can make a difference in our neighborhoods and communities. It can make a difference in our churches. Love revealed in compassionate deeds, kind words, and unselfish actions does make a difference.

Heaven's love overflowed from the life of Jesus, and He changed the world. When heaven's love flows from our lives, we too will change our world.—Mark Finley, *Solid Ground,* pp. 370, 371.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Persecution is what happens when other people oppose you for your faith. Service is what happens when you dedicate your life to God. Not all of us will be in such an extreme stance as Mrs. ten Boom was, but we can certainly make it our business to be found doing what God asks of us when He returns. Jesus told His disciples about the trouble ahead for believers; however, He didn't want them to live in fear. Instead of being afraid of hard times and hiding away, we should be looking for ways to help those around us, and letting God take care of the rest.

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 warnings of difficult times ahead.
- *Circle* the instructions for how Christians should be living.
- *Put a box* around the state of the world when Jesus comes again.
- How many things do we have control over? Realizing that those things are in God's control helps take away our anxiety.

Use the following as more teachable passages that

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

How to Show Appreciation

Show sincere appreciation when the student does something right.

Singling teens out for bad behavior often causes rebellion to save face. Teens also tend to be embarrassed and act out when singled out of a group for positive reinforcement, so direct your comments to the group. You can say something broad such as, "You are an incredibly creative group!" or something more direct such as, "That is a well-thought-out answer. That was nicely discussed and presented. Well done."

Another way to show appreciation for a job well done (the "hit and run" method) is to talk to the student privately after class, then send them immediately away (to church) so that they will not feel put on the spot when receiving the compliment.

relate to today's story: Acts 7; Mark 13; Luke 12:1-12.

Sharing Context and Background

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

Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) argued the case of the Christians before the Roman government: "But go to it, my good magistrates! The populace will count you a great deal better if you sacrifice the Christians to them. Torture us, rack us, condemn us, crush us; your cruelty only proves our innocence. That is why God suffers us to suffer all this. But nothing whatever is accomplished by your cruelties, each more exquisite than the last. It is the bait that wins men for our school. We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed. That very obstinacy with which you taunt us is your teacher. For who beholds it and is not stirred to inquire what lies indeed within it? Who, on inquiry, does not join us, and joining us, does not wish to suffer, that he may purchase for himself the whole grace of God."

The early Christians faced horrible persecution, but there were several reasons for this. At first, Christianity was identified with Judaism, but people quickly realized that it was a different religion altogether. It did not belong to a certain geographical group, but it spread quickly, making the sensible Romans and Jews very nervous.

Christians refused to worship the Roman emperors. They would worship only their own God, and would not take part in the religious ceremonies that the pagan Romans believed would please their pantheon of fickle and self-centered gods. They saw the Christians as a very real threat to their safety and good fortune. Tertullian wrote: "The Christians are to blame for every public disaster and every misfortune

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.*

that befalls the people. If the Tiber rises to the walls, if the Nile fails to rise and flood the fields, if the sky withholds its rain, if there is earthquake or famine or plague, straightway the cry arises: The Christians to the lions!"

To others the Christians seemed very narrow and inflexible. Their refusal to worship the emperor did not make sense to the society around them. What harm would it do to worship him just a little bit? Especially considering the death sentence for refusing to offer worship to the emperor, what kind of people would choose death over a little bit of incense and a few muttered words? Their obstinacy made them disliked by the population at large.

In spite of all of this, the Christians stayed true to their beliefs and faced persecution and death rather than betray Christ.

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Have the class put the following items on a spectrum of importance, 1 being of the least importance to them and 10 being the most important.

1. Equality
2. Right to free speech
3. Right to privacy
4. Championing the rights of people in other countries
5. Furthering the rights of people in your own country
6. Right to worship as you choose

Focusing on the right to worship as you choose, why did they put it where they did on the continuum? What is their reasoning?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The early Christians faced intense persecution. But with God's strength and a sense of His presence with them, they were able to face death in order to stand for what they knew was right. God was very real to them. It is difficult for us to imagine having to face that kind of adversity for our religious convictions, but many people in different countries do. In our comfortable position where we are permitted to worship as we choose and face very little opposition, we do not experience the same test of our faith. How real is God to us? Is He real enough to give us the same strength of early Christians? If not, let's get to know Him better. God is longing to communicate with us and to share a real relationship, not just lip service. Let's decide today to ask God to show us how real He is.



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 1, 2.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Matthew 24; 2 Timothy 3:12.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 1, 2.

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Photo by Terrill Thomas

keytext

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns."

(Matthew 24:45, 46, NIV)

flashlight

"The mysterious providence which permits the righteous to suffer persecution at the hand of the wicked has been a cause of great perplexity to many who are weak in faith. Some are even ready to cast away their confidence in God. . . . God has given us sufficient evidence of His love, and we are not to doubt His goodness because we cannot understand the workings of His providence. . . . Jesus suffered for us more than any of His followers can be made to suffer through the cruelty of wicked men" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 47).

what do you think?

Look at the list below and put each item in order of what is most important to you. Which would you be willing to die for?

____ Theological doctrines
____ Your personal faith
____ Your family
____ Your friends
____ Your civil rights
____ Your country
____ Someone else's rights
____ Stopping the suffering of another person

Which things top your personal list and why? Which things would you not be willing to die for?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

did you know?

Persecution as it was known to the early Christians does not exist in North America today. We oftentimes think of ourselves as persecuted when someone disagrees with us or declines to give us a job if we aren't able to work on Sabbath. (That's more accurately described as religious discrimination.) But the kind of persecution that the early believers endured was different. They faced death—horrible, brutal deaths.

In other parts of the world Christians still face persecution in its truest sense. They risk their lives and the lives of their families in order to worship God. They are willing to die in order to follow the law of God. Now, *that* is devotion!

(To see what the Adventist Church is doing to fight religious discrimination and persecution, visit http://parl.gc.adventist.org.)

INTO THE STORY

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'

"Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Messiah," and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

"'Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. . . .

"'Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

"'Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.'"

(Matthew 24:3-14, 30-39, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Why do you think Jesus gave the disciples the information that He did?

_____
_____
_____

What does this tell us about the kind of relationship they shared with Jesus? How did they achieve this kind of communication? How can we?

_____
_____
_____

How was this information important to the people in Jesus' day? How is it important for us today?

_____
_____
_____

How do you think it would be possible for someone to deceive God's people?

_____
_____
_____

The text tells us that no one except the Father knows when Jesus will return. Why do you think people try to figure out the exact time of His return?

_____
_____
_____

How are things today like "in the days of Noah"?

_____
_____
_____

As you read this passage, do you find it frightening to think about the end times and the hard times described? Why or why not?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me" **(Psalm 50:15, NIV).**

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" **(Psalm 23:4, NIV).**

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants" **(Psalm 116:15, NIV).**

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" **(Romans 8:35, NIV).**

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown" **(Revelation 2:10, NIV).**

further insight

"The sufferings which they endured brought Christians nearer to one another and to their Redeemer."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 42

Sabbath

Read Revelation 2:10.

This text says that those who are "faithful, even to the point of death" will receive a heavenly reward. What things in life are you willing to die for? Why would you be willing to die for them? Look at the list in the *What Do You Think?* section and be honest with yourself—would you be willing to die for any of these things?

There are many jobs in our society that have a very high risk factor. List three occupations in which people risk their lives. Beside each occupation, write how you feel about their sacrifice.

Sunday

Read Matthew 24.

Jesus' disciples asked Him what the signs of the last days would be. What Jesus told them was a double prophecy. On one level Jesus was warning them of the impending destruction of Jerusalem to happen in A.D. 70. It would be horrific, and Jesus wanted His people to be able to escape. Ellen White tells us that none of the Christians died in that siege because they had been watching for the signs Jesus gave. On another level Jesus was telling them a brief outline of Christianity and what events would happen before His coming—the actual question His disciples had been asking. Why do you think Jesus gave them information in this way? Do you think they could have handled Jesus' torture and death, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the last days all at once? What do you think this tells us about how God communicates with us?

Monday

Read Matthew 24:45, 46.

When we think about Jesus coming again, we wonder if we are ready. At the end of Matthew 24 Jesus tells a parable about a master who goes away and leaves a servant in charge of feeding the other servants. When the master returns, it will be good for the servant who is found doing just as he was told to do.

Identify three things that you believe God wants you to be doing right now in your life. They don't have to be anything monumental. The servant in the parable was left in charge of the menu plan! Now look at those three things. What is important about them? How dedicated are you to doing those things, even if it gets difficult?

Tuesday

Read Revelation 2:10.

Look through a newspaper or an online news source today and note all the stories about suffering. What sorts of stories do you see? Why good people suffer is a question people have wrestled with since the beginning of time. For each story of suffering you find, think about how God might be working in the lives of the people experiencing such hard times. Refer back to yesterday's *Key Text.* What might God be asking you to do to care for the people around you?

Wednesday

Read Romans 8:35.

Thinking about what the early Christians endured is pretty unsettling. It isn't typical human nature to face death on principle. Look at each of the *Punch Lines* texts. Beside each one write down the hope that it offers. Where do you think the early Christians got their strength to face death for their faith? What could God's presence with them have done to turn a horrific nightmare into a heroic stand?

Thursday

Read Psalm 116:15.

We might not have to face death for our faith in Jesus, but we do face opposition. In what ways can you find courage from the experience of the early Christians to stand for what you believe in?

Pray today that God will not only show you what He wants you to do for Him, but also give you the courage to do it!

Friday

Read Psalm 23:4.

God is real! Do you think that the early Christians would have been willing to face death if they did not feel His presence with them in a very real way? What is your experience with God like? Is God an idea? an ideal? a set of rules? If you don't experience God in your life in a very real way, you are missing out on something exciting and empowering!

How real is God to you? How real do you want Him to be?

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 1, 2.

**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.