CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
MARCH 21 2026

hope against hope

Scripture Story: Acts 18:18-28; 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 25, 26.
Key Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Paul had a complicated mission. He was sent to teach the Gentiles about Jesus and His sacrifice, people who did not know God at all. He had a responsibility to show them the character of Jesus in a way that they would understand. He had to give "milk" to the baby Christians and more solid sustenance to the more mature believers. He had to balance encouragement with reprimands for bad behavior. He had to meet the needs of people from every walk of life. It certainly was not an easy calling!

One of the basic doctrines that Paul felt was important to teach was that of Jesus' second coming. He wanted to encourage the new believers with the knowledge that Jesus would come again, the dead would be raised, and all those who accepted Jesus' sacrifice on their behalf would live forever with Him.

When we have heard the good news repeatedly, the effect seems to wear off. Many of us do not fully appreciate what this really means in our lives. Many of us have been raised since infants knowing that Jesus will come again, but we fail to see what life would be like without that hope. In fact, we seem to take it for granted.

When we can see what God is really giving us, it gives us a new realization of our responsibility toward others in their spiritual walks. Service becomes central to our lives, and we realize that how we represent God matters immensely in the lives of unbelievers or baby Christians.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand why the good news really is so good. *(Know)*
- Sense a responsibility toward others in their spiritual walk. *(Feel)*
- Choose to see the service opportunities as well as the difference that our hope in Jesus gives us. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Second Coming of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs, No. 25

The second coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. When He returns, the righteous dead will be resurrected, and together with the righteous living will be glorified and taken to heaven, but the unrighteous will die. The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is near. The time of that event has not been revealed, and we are therefore exhorted to be ready at all times (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 5:1-6; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 2:8; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21).

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.*

Ask the students to imagine that there is no hope after they die. Let them imagine that Jesus is not coming again and that once we die there is nothing else.

What would they do differently in their lives if this were the case? Would they feel a responsibility toward others? How would they feel about helping others? How would they feel about their relationships, knowing that nothing would last longer than life on this earth?

Now, let them imagine that they are being told "the good news" that Jesus is coming, and that there is hope for living eternally? How would they feel now?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

"Helen Keller grew up in a world shut in by blindness and deafness. She became an almost uncontrollable 'wild child' of intense passions.

"One day while Helen was playing with a new doll her patient tutor, Anne Sullivan, placed the toy in Helen's lap and signed the letters d-o-l-l in her palm repeatedly. But Helen didn't understand. As the tutor tried to help her connect this thing in her lap with the signs on her palm the girl became agitated. She slammed the doll on the floor, breaking it to pieces.

"Later Miss Sullivan took the unruly girl down the path to the well house. Someone was pumping water. Placing Helen's hand under the cool flow, the tutor spelled out w-a-t-e-r on her other palm. Suddenly it clicked in the girl's mind. Later Helen recalled, 'The mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!'

"The soul of this wild child, shut away in her own darkened world, was set free by the discovery of the living word. God's living Word, the Bible, illuminates the darkness of our minds and sets us free as well. You can experience the exhilarating freedom that the living Word brings" (Mark Finley, *Solid Ground,* p. 10).

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Paul had some difficult students to teach as well. He had people from all walks of life, from every religious background, all looking to him to learn about this Jewish Messiah who came for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. It wasn't easy, but just like the young teacher he had to find a way to reach these people where they were. There were specific things that Paul felt were important for these baby Christians to understand.

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.*

- What is the reason for Paul's letter?
- What things does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do in their spiritual growth?
- Why do you think Paul's explanation of what will happen at the Second Coming was so important to these people?
- How would it have affected their lives on a personal level to have this information? How would they see things differently?
- How might this knowledge change how they feel? How would it encourage them?
- If you had no hope of a resurrection in Jesus, how would it change your outlook on life?

Extra Questions for Teachers

- What practical advice did Paul have for the Thessalonians?
- What positive reinforcement did Paul give them?
- In what ways can we see Paul being gentle with them?
- What encouragement did he give?

Use the following as other teachable passages that relate to today's story: 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 13.

Sharing Context and Background

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

Thessalonica was a principle city in Macedonia as well as a primary port. It was founded in 316 B.C., during the reign of Alexander the Great. It became

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

A Safe Environment

Teens will feel more comfortable sharing what they think if they know that what they say won't be immediately reported back to their parents or used as a humorous anecdote later on. Everyone needs to feel secure that they won't be made fun of or reprimanded for their honest opinions.

a very important city under the Roman rule as well. The Christian church there was the second church founded in Europe, and Paul wrote this letter from Athens in A.D. 51 or 52. Acts 18 tells us a little bit surrounding the time that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written.

Paul had great success in winning converts to Christianity, but he also faced great opposition. He had to leave the new Thessalonian church before it had become firmly established because of the opposition. He was worried for the new converts, though, afraid that they would be persecuted. Paul sent Timothy to them to encourage them and to report back to Him on how they were doing. When Timothy reported back that the new converts were standing firm in their faith, Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, his letter to them.

Paul was writing to this new church to encourage them to live holy lives. He wrote 2 Thessalonians not long after 1 Thessalonians as a "PS" of sorts, explaining what they had misunderstood. Mainly, they thought that Jesus would return in their lifetimes, and they were afraid that those who died before the event would not inherit eternal life. So in 1 Thessalonians, Paul addressed this issue.

In the Thessalonians' zeal for the gospel, and to demonstrate their belief that Jesus' coming was in the very near future, some of the members of the church stopped working their professions. They would have been a burden to those who were still working and an object of ridicule for unbelievers. This situation needed to be dealt with. So Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, insisting that they needed to continue working their regular jobs and not wait idly for Jesus to return. Paul outlined some of the things that had to take place before Jesus would return, namely the coming of the antichrist.

These letters to the Thessalonians give us a good view into what the early Christians were taught regarding some important doctrines, such as the resurrection. Many people worry that we have moved away from the original teachings of Christianity, but by reading Paul's letters to the early churches, we are able to see exactly what Paul taught.

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 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.*

III. CLOSING

Activity

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

Ask the students to each think of a time or situation that makes them long for Jesus to come. Perhaps it is when they see horrible things happening on the news on TV. Or maybe they long for Jesus to come when someone close to them dies or is in pain. Discuss these situations as well as what kinds of feelings they have surrounding them. Read the *Key Text* and say the following: "This verse tells us to encourage each other with these words. How do these words encourage you?"

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Paul was teaching some new Christians some very important lessons about living a Christian life, and about our hope of Jesus coming again. Everyone is at a different level in their relationship with Jesus. Being a beginner doesn't make a person less important or less loved, but it does give us a special responsibility to encourage and support that person. Sometimes we have the urge to judge someone by their actions or attitudes, but if we remember that they might be at a different level of understanding or at a different place in their relationship with God, we can be more patient and deal with them differently.

In all of our lives, it is comforting to remember that Jesus IS coming, and that the pain and sadness of this world will NOT last. Stick with it! Things are going to get better!

Today is Global Youth Day!

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 25, 26.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

MARCH21**2026**

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Acts 18:18-28; 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
Commentary: The *Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 25, 26.

hope against hope

Photo by Sara-May Colón

keytext

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

(1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, NIV)

flashlight

"Paul had necessarily adapted his manner of teaching to the condition of the church. 'I, brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual,' he afterward explained to them, 'but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.' 1 Corinthians 3:1, 2. Many of the Corinthian believers had been slow to learn the lessons that he was endeavoring to teach them. . . . However wise they might be in worldly knowledge, they were but babes in the knowledge of Christ" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 271).

what do you think?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

____ I don't think about Jesus' coming very often—it's too far away.

____ I don't think that Jesus' second coming affects my life right now.

____ Knowing that Jesus will come again and let me live for eternity makes me take things in life more seriously.

____ I believe that when I die, it is not the end for me, and that when Jesus returns I will be reunited with the people I love who believed in Jesus.

did you know?

The watchful Christian is a working Christian, seeking zealously to do all in his power for the advancement of the gospel. As love for his Redeemer increases, so also does love for his fellow men. He has severe trials, as had his Master; but he does not allow affliction to sour his temper or destroy his peace of mind. He knows that trial, if well borne, will refine and purify him, and bring him into closer fellowship with Christ. Those who are partakers of Christ's sufferings will also be partakers of His consolation and at last sharers of His glory" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 261).

INTO THE STORY

"As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

"Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

(1 Thessalonians 4, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

What is the reason for Paul's letter?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What things does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to do in their spiritual growth?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Why do you think that Paul's explanation of what will happen at the Second Coming was so important to these people?

_____
_____
_____
_____

How would it have affected their lives on a personal level to have this information? How would they see things differently?

_____
_____
_____
_____

How might this knowledge have changed how they felt and encouraged them? How might it change and encourage you?

_____
_____
_____
_____

If you had no hope of a resurrection in Jesus, how would it change your outlook on life?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"And I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" **(Acts 24:15, 16, NIV).**

"For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" **(Romans 8:24, NIV).**

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" **(Hebrews 11:1, NIV).**

"There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" **(Proverbs 23:18, NIV).**

"Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold" **(2 Corinthians 3:12, NIV).**

further insight

"There are in the world today many who close their eyes to the evidences that Christ has given to warn men of His coming. They seek to quiet all apprehension, while at the same time the signs of the end are rapidly fulfilling, and the world is hastening to the time when the Son of man shall be revealed in the clouds of heaven."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 260

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read Acts 24:15, 16.

Sometimes we hear about Jesus' second coming so often that we stop feeling how important it is. But think about it today. What if Jesus weren't coming? What if death were the end? What if we would never see our loved ones again, and after they were gone, we had to say goodbye forever? What if your eventual death would be the absolute end of you, and your life on earth had no meaning beyond the few years you spent here? What a depressing thought! When you really think about it, Jesus coming again and raising us back to life is good news! How do you think that Jesus' coming again affects you today?

Sunday

Read Romans 8:24.

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12, NIV).

Think about Paul's advice to the Thessalonians. How can you lead a life that will win the respect of the people around you? Is there a difference between winning people's respect and being popular?

Monday

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18.

First Thessalonians 4:16-18 tells how Jesus will come and raise the dead. Paul advises us to encourage each other with this knowledge. How can we encourage others with the knowledge that there is something more than life on earth? Is there a way to tell others about this without seeming like a street preacher? What can you do in your own personal life that will show others that there is more to life than just the here and now?

Tuesday

Read Proverbs 23:18.

Ellen White explains how Paul had to adapt his preaching to reach people at different levels of their spiritual development. The Corinthians were baby Christians, and they needed a different approach than mature Christians would need. Paul said they still needed milk. That didn't mean that they were of less value or lower in status. We don't believe that babies matter less than we do; in fact, we give them more care and attention because they are so vulnerable! Do you take your friends' level of spiritual interest into account when you talk to them about your life with God? Would you consider yourself a mature Christian yet? What can you do to grow in your spiritual experience?

Wednesday

The verses in the *Punch Lines* talk about hope and what hope does for us in our lives. What hope do you have because of your belief in Jesus? How has that hope for forgiveness, heaven, and eternal life changed your life? How is your life different than someone else's life who might live without the hope you have? Hope gives us the courage to step out and try more than we ever thought we could! What do you think God wants you to try today?

Thursday

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12.

We can see from Paul's way of approaching the Thessalonians and the Corinthians that he was willing to adjust himself to meet the needs of the people. While God wants us to be true to who He created us to be, and while He does not want us to compromise our beliefs or ethics, He does want us to be flexible in the service of others. Everyone has different needs. Some people could just use a smile. Others could use an honest, friendly conversation. Others might need something as elemental as a warm meal or a secondhand coat. Try to see others as an opportunity for service. What needs can you meet?

Friday

Read Hebrews 11:1.

Life is not just about the 70-odd years we might spend on this planet. It isn't about getting as much money as possible, or about experiencing as much as possible. While God certainly wants us to live our lives to the fullest, we aren't supposed to do that at the expense of others. After studying this week, do you feel differently about the fact that Jesus is going to come again to raise the dead and bring us to live with Him? Do you see life any differently? What responsibility do you feel toward others in their spiritual experience?

this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 25, 26.

* 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 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.