

This midweek study will explore the importance of the doctrine of the authority of Scripture, noting that Scripture is God's inspired Word, is essential in equipping believers, and how its main goal is to make us happy in Jesus. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Authority of Scripture

Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, containing God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.

Scripture: Proverbs 22:19-21; John 20:30-31; 1 Corinthians 13:37-38; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 4:6; Revelation 22:18-19

1 The Bible is God's very word to us, inspired through human writers (1 Cor. 14:37-38; 1 John 4:6).

Both Paul and John recognized that the words they wrote were the very commandments of the Lord. John actually went so far as to claim that we could tell who was a Christian ("from God") and who wasn't by whether or not they listened to him! That's an amazing and, seemingly, arrogant claim. Yet it's not arrogant because it's true. John and Paul know their authority; they know God inspires them with His very words, and so what they write is absolutely authoritative.

2 The Bible is sufficient in itself for every situation in every time (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19).

Some people consider the Bible to be old or outdated, but the Bible itself seems to think otherwise. In 2 Timothy 3:17, Paul makes abundantly clear that the Scripture is sufficient; it is useful for a variety of purposes; it makes the man of God *thoroughly* equipped for *every* good work. Sure, it might not have specifics on how to pay off a credit card or on how to love your next-door neighbor, but its principles can be applied across any culture or time. No wonder John insisted that nothing should be removed from nor would anything need to be added to Revelation.

3 The Bible's main purpose is to make us happy in Jesus (Prov. 22:19-21; John 20:30-31).

All too often we miss the main point of the Bible: to make us happy in Jesus. Solomon (in Proverbs) and John (in his Gospel) make clear that their goal is for their readers to trust God and be happy in Him. Jesus said as much in John 15:11; Paul joins with all the biblical writers in affirming that their scriptural authority is not to control us, but to work with us for our joy (2 Cor. 1:24).

Opening Activity

How do you know? Ask for a brave volunteer. Ask that volunteer, in front of everyone, to tell you one fact she knows to be true. When she gives you her answer, ask how she knows. When she answers that question, ask her how she knows that is true. And then ask her how she knows that answer is true. Keep going until the volunteer gets to a point where she says something like, "I just know it!" Repeat with another volunteer or two if you wish.

Chances are, they'll ultimately fall back to what they know in their heart, what they see or feel with their senses, or what some authority figure has told them. Point out that we all have some ultimate authority we trust to give us truth; perhaps it's our senses, logic and reason, our family, or tradition. Whatever it is, we all have something we trust just *because*. For Christians, that final, ultimate authority is the Bible.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Word of God Speak" by MercyMe
(*Spoken For*, INO Records, 2002)
- ▶ "Your Words" by Third Day
(*Lead Us Back: Songs of Worship*, Provident Label Group, 2015)
- ▶ "Amen" by Steven Curtis Chapman
(*Amen-Single*, Provident Label Group, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "iBible Nano" BluefishTV.com
- ▶ "World vs Christian: The Bible" SkitGuys.com

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1 The Bible is God's very word to us, inspired through human writers (1 Cor. 14:37-38; 1 John 4:6).

Option: Ask the students to come up with a list of as many different means of communication as possible. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each? For instance, Morse Code can travel long distances and cross languages; however, it takes a long time to decode. Texting is instantaneous, but it can be difficult to capture nuances, and texts can be kept forever (for better or for worse).

- ▶ *If you were only allowed to communicate with others via one means, what would it be? Why?*

Read 1 Corinthians 14:37-38 and 1 John 4:6.

- ▶ *How did God choose to communicate (primarily) with His people?*
- ▶ *God chose to communicate to us primarily through a book. What are the implications for us?*

For instance, we ought to learn to be good readers and critical thinkers. We should meditate on and memorize sections of the book.

2 The Bible is sufficient in itself for every situation in every time (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rev. 22:18-19).

- ▶ *Imagine you are (for whatever reason) sentenced to be locked into a time machine. The time machine will be set to "random," and then they'll push the button and you'll have a one-way ticket to who knows when. Could be the future, the distant past, two weeks ago—who knows? You are allowed to bring one relatively small item with you (less than a square meter). What would you choose to bring? Why?*

You probably chose something that you thought could be useful any time, anywhere. For Christians, the Bible is useful and authoritative for every time and place.

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Revelation 22:18-19.

- ▶ *What are some of the things Paul says Scripture is good for? How well equipped will the man or woman of God be with the Scriptures? What percentage of good works will the Bible prepare the Christian for?*
- ▶ *Why do you think John was so insistent that nothing be taken away or added to Revelation, and by extension, the Bible?*

3 The Bible's main purpose is to make us happy in Jesus (Prov. 22:19-21; John 20:30-31).

- ▶ *Why do you think most Christians read their Bible? If you read your Bible, why do you do so? If you don't, but think you should, why do you think you should?*

Read Proverbs 22:19-21 and John 20:30-31.

- ▶ *Why did Solomon want us to read his proverbs? Why did John write his Gospel?*
- ▶ *Paraphrase your previous answer in your own words. If Solomon or John had one wish for you, what would it be?*
- ▶ *The main purpose of the Bible is to make us happy in Jesus. How does this affect the way we approach the Bible? How does it affect the way we approach specific sections?*

For instance, when we read laws and commands, we should consider their goal is not tell us to what to do, but to promote attitudes and behaviors that will bring us maximum happiness in Jesus. When we come across difficult texts, we should consider how this passage is supposed to help us trust God and treasure Jesus.

WRAP IT UP

A college professor once said the most profound words he'd ever heard were, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Why is that last clause so important?

This midweek study will explore the truth of what it means that God is unchanging. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: God is Unchanging

God's being, attributes, and the ethical commitments He has given cannot change. This means, among other things, that God is committed to being God, and that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God's unchanging nature is good news for Christians, for it guarantees that God does not change His mind or go back on His promises. Christians can find assurance and peace of mind in knowing that the God who brought them out of darkness into His marvelous light is the God who will carry them through into eternity.

Scripture: *Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Isaiah 46:8-11; Malachi 3:6; Romans 4:23-24; Hebrews 13:8*

1 God's immutability shows His perfect beauty (1 Sam. 15:29; Heb. 13:8).

There's good reason 1 Samuel 15:29 is phrased as beautifully as it is: the Glory of Israel doesn't change His mind because He doesn't need to. He's not a man; He's perfect. If He changed, the only direction He could go is down; He's already the height of perfection. The perfectly glorious and marvelous one need never change.

2 God's immutability gives us hope when we fail (Mal. 3:6; Rom. 4:23-24).

We all fail. And if we're honest, when we fail, we can't do anything to "undo" our mistakes (our lives aren't computers). The consequences must fall on someone—either ourselves, another, or both. The good news for us, just like Malachi's fellow Israelites, is that God doesn't change. However much we sin, His love for us and covenant faithfulness remains the same, and so we have hope to continue.

3 God's immutability gives us perfect assurance (Num. 23:19; Isa. 46:8-11).

God's immutability assures us not only in the face of our own sin, but in the face of others' sin, in the face of life, and in the face of eternity. Balaam's curse (Num. 23:19) was useless against the Israelites because the unchanging God had destined them for glory. From the beginning, God ordained the Babylonians to chastise Israel, and He knew how it would all end: for the good of His beloved. And 10,000 years from now, we can be assured that God will not grow tired of us or decide to call the whole heavenly party off. He, the Glory of Israel, will not change His mind (1 Sam. 15:29).

Opening Activity

Ask for some student volunteers to give their dream *fill-in-the-blank*. They might describe their dream house, their dream car, their dream school, their dream date, their dream job, or their dream vacation. You could ask the entire group to create a list describing their dream vacation, or you could assign individual dreams to individual students (i.e., you assign Tommy his dream car, but Janet her dream school). Once you give several volunteers the chance to share their dream Xs, ask each of them: "If I could give you your dream X, right now, exactly as you described it, what would you change?" Presumably, they'll each respond with "Nothing." Make the point that they would change nothing about it because nothing needs to be changed; it's already perfect how it is. That's exactly how God is; He is forever unchanging, because He is gloriously and magnificently perfect how He is.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Good Good Father" by Chris Tomlin
(*Good Good Father - Single*, Sparrow Records, 2015)
- ▶ "How Can It Be" by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ "Blessed Assurance" by Matthew West
(*Blessed Assurance: [My King Is Coming] - Single*, Sparrow Records, 2013)

Video Idea

- ▶ "Our Mess, God's Masterpiece" *SkitGuys.com*

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1 God's immutability shows His perfect beauty

(1 Sam.15:29; Heb. 13:8).

- ▶ *Tell your students to imagine a romantic couple on a date. Imagine one of them says to the other, "I wouldn't change a thing about this moment," or "I wouldn't change a thing about you." What is that person really saying with those expressions?*

The other person or this moment couldn't be improved; the speaker is completely and totally happy in that moment or with the other person.

Read Hebrews 13:8 and 1 Samuel 15:29..

- ▶ *How are we supposed to feel when we know that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever? Use the context for clues if necessary.*

Answer: We feel assurance and contentment in His beauty. From Hebrews, we also know we can follow the example of others because the God they followed is the same God we follow. From 1 Samuel, we see that God's never changing is a display of His excellence and glory and how He is so far above any human creature.

2 God's immutability gives us hope when we fail

(Mal. 3:6; Rom. 4:23-24).

- ▶ *How does it feel to have someone tell you they will love you regardless of what you do? Do you tend to have more respect for someone whose care for you is unchanging regardless of your behavior, or for someone whose affection varies based on your performance?*

Read Romans 4:23-24.

- ▶ *Why would Paul use Abraham as an example to us of someone who trusted God?*

Because Abraham was mentioned very early in the Bible. Paul is emphasizing that God doesn't change; just as Abraham was saved by faith, so also are we, even thousands of years later.

Read Malachi 3:6.

- ▶ *Why aren't the Israelites consumed by God's anger? Should the Lord's never-changing nature cause the Israelites to continue in sin or to repent? What about us?*

3 God's immutability gives us perfect assurance

(Num. 23:19; Isa. 46:8-11).

Optional: Have students play a short game like hangman or charades. However, keep changing something as they go. Change the word they're trying to guess or act out, or change the rules of the game. Afterward, ask them how they felt when you kept making changes. We don't like to have things change on us; we perform better with consistency. Good news: God is always unchanging!

- ▶ *What are some constants in your life? They could be physical (i.e., gravity) or emotional (your family's love). Are you glad for constants or not?*

Read Isaiah 46:9-11. Remind students of who this "bird of prey" (Babylon) was and how it was the most powerful human empire in the world at the time.

- ▶ *How are we supposed to feel when we know that God is in control of everything, from the beginning to the end? What clues in the text give us this feeling?*

God calls us transgressors but tells us to be assured; He says there is no one like Him, which should make us feel in awe. He controls the mightiest empire ever, so we should be further in awe and feel assurance and gratitude at His love.

Read Numbers 23:19.

- ▶ *Why was Balaam only able to bless Israel and not curse it?*
- ▶ *How would the Israelites have felt hearing this verse? How would they have responded in their attitudes and in their lifestyles? How should we?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How does Jesus show God's unchanging nature?*

You could give numerous answers, such as Jesus' setting His face like flint to go to the cross and never wavering.

- ▶ *Name one way we can rest in God's unchanging nature this week.*

This midweek study will explore the truth of what it means that Christ is King. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Christ as King

God has always been King over His Kingdom from eternity past, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.

Scripture: *Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:4-6; Isaiah 6:1,5; Isaiah 40:22; Hebrews 2:6-9; Revelation 3:21*

1 God is king over all creation (Isa. 6:1,5; 40:22).

God's kingship over His creation assures us He remains involved with the world and sovereign over it. Note that Isaiah's vision happens the same year the human king, Uzziah, died. It's as if God wanted to emphasize that regardless of worldly events, He indeed remains enthroned above the heavens.

2 God entrusted mankind with kingship (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4-6).

When God finished His creation, He endowed His authority to Adam and Eve. They were to be His appointed vice-regents, reflecting God's rule over the universe in their compassionate rule over the earth. In Psalm 6, David recognizes this vice-regency to be an amazing privilege and a daunting responsibility. Of course, sadly, man failed in this duty in the fall and continues to fail in it as he pollutes the world, fails to bring justice to all, and fails to love his **neighbor**.

3 Jesus Messiah, the God-Man, is the ultimate promised King (Heb. 2:6-9; Rev. 3:21).

God's plan for man to be king never changed; nor did God ever intend to stop being King Himself. Jesus is the appointed God-Man who rules over all the earth. He does what Adam didn't (and we don't): He rules perfectly. What's more, He ordains that He will not rule alone. Christians will rule alongside Jesus, fulfilling Genesis 1:28 after all. No wonder Paul blesses Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15)!

Opening Activity

Tell the kids to pretend that they are Merlin, and their job is to write a letter for the young King Arthur (Arthur is still a boy; he has yet to become the man and fully inherit his throne). This letter is supposed to tell Arthur how to be a good king; he will keep it and refer to it frequently as he rules. Ask each student to write out the three most important pieces of advice they could give. Then have them share their answers. Use the answers to lead into a discussion of what a king is and what is expected of him. Segue to the idea that God is our king. How does He perfectly fulfill what a king should be and do?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Here is Our King (A Collision Album Version)" by David Crowder
(*Collision or [3+4=7]*, Sparrow Records, 2005)
- ▶ "Limitless" by Colton Dixon
(*Anchor*, Sparrow Records, 2014)
- ▶ "Jesus Messiah" by Chris Tomlin
(*How Great Is Our God: The Essential Collection*, Sparrow Records, 2011)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "King of Kings" *SkitGuys.com*
- ▶ "Video" *website*

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1 God is king over all creation

(Isa. 6:1,5; 40:22).

Activity: Ask the students to imagine that the United States' government changed to a monarchy tomorrow. Furthermore, they're to imagine that they, individually, were appointed as the new king. What would be the first thing they would do? Use their answers to lead in to our perception of kings and what makes a good or a bad king.

- ▶ *If you could be ruled over by any kind of government, what would you pick? If you found out that you were born under a monarchy, would you be glad? Why or why not?*

Read Isaiah 6:1,5; 40:22.

- ▶ *How do you react to finding out that God is King? Is that good news or bad? Why?*
- ▶ *Why do you think God chose the title of King as one of the ways to show himself to us? Why not President, or Prime Minister?*

2 God entrusted mankind with kingship

(Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4-6).

- ▶ *Pretend that Adam, before the Fall, decides to write up his resume. What kind of words do you think he would use to describe his employment?*

Let them give their answers. See if anyone suggests king. If not, present it. Would anyone consider Adam a king? Why or why not?

Read Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:4-6.

- ▶ *According to Genesis 1, what was Adam's relationship to the rest of creation? If God is king, how can Adam also be king?*
If necessary, explain the idea of vice-regency to them.
- ▶ *According to Psalm 8, what is humanity's place in the universe? How does it make you feel to know that we hold such an exalted place?*
- ▶ *If we hold such a high role in creation, what does that knowledge imply for the severity of our failures and sin?*

3 Jesus Messiah, the God-Man, is the ultimate promised King (Heb. 2:6-9; Rev. 3:21).

- ▶ *When Adam and Eve sinned, did God "give up" on the plan for humanity to rule? If yes, what was God's new plan? If no, how will God ever bring humanity to the point of ruling?*

Either way, start to lead them to Jesus as the great human king.

Read Hebrews 2:6-9 and Revelation 3:21

- ▶ *Does the passage in Hebrews sound familiar? The Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. The writer of Hebrews explains to us that Psalm 8 really points to Jesus as the king. And Revelation 3 reminds us that we also will rule with Jesus!*
- ▶ *How does the knowledge that we will rule with Jesus affect the way we think, feel, and live today?*
- ▶ *You may be familiar with C. S. Lewis' The Chronicles of Narnia. If you are, how does Aslan show Jesus' kingship well? How does Aslan appointing the Pevensie children as kings and queens reflect the ideas of humanity's vice-regency we've been talking about?*

WRAP IT UP

Psalm 2 points to Jesus' kingship. Verse 11 tells us to "rejoice with trembling" as we do homage to the King. In what ways should Jesus' kingship make us tremble? In what ways should it make us rejoice? You could give numerous answers, such as Jesus' setting His face like flint to go to the cross and never wavering.

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of edification. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Edification

Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.

Scripture: *Romans 8:13-14; 15:2; 1 Corinthians 14:12,26; Philippians 1:25; 2:12-13; 1 Peter 2:5*

1 Edification is one we reason we don't get raptured immediately after salvation (Phil. 1:25).

You may be familiar with Paul's famous verse, "For me, living is Christ and dying is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Contextually, Paul is trying to decide between life and death; he says he would prefer death because then he could be with Jesus (v. 23), but he ends up saying he will continue in life specifically because he can then help the Philippians to progress and rejoice in the faith. That's huge! Paul shows us the importance of edification by delaying his meeting Jesus so he can pursue others' edification. We should realize it's a big deal; it's the reason we don't immediately get raptured to be with Jesus when we get saved.

2 The principle of edification guides us on what it really means to love people (Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:12,26)

In a culture where all too often loving people is synonymous with affirming them and making them feel good, it can be tough to know what it truly means to love someone. Paul, in both 1 Corinthians 14 and in Romans 15, grants us helpful clarity: real love pursues edification. That is, it does what is needed to help someone treasure Jesus above all else. That's a really helpful distinction when trying to determine the best way to love your neighbor.

3 Edification is a work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13-14; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Particularly in America, we can over-emphasize the role of our willpower in being built up in the Lord. Fortunately, Peter and Paul both remind us that edification is ultimately the Spirit's job. We "are being built," according to 1 Peter (note the passive!); we are being led by the Spirit, according to Romans 8; it is God himself (wow!) who works in us, according to Philippians.

Opening Activity

Option 1: The What's Next? Club. Have your students imagine your church has assembled a "What's Next? Club" for new Christians. Your kids are in charge of it. The members are all brand-new Christians who want to know "what's next" after salvation. Ask your students for suggestions. Finish up by telling them that "what's next" is edification (you can segue immediately into the first point if you wish).

Option 2: Ask students to pretend there's one person in your youth group who keeps singing praise songs while you're trying to teach. She insists her singing is to magnify Jesus and that it helps her feel closer to Him. If you ask her to stop, she says you're not being very loving. However, it's keeping the lesson from happening. How would your students suggest handling it? Let them discuss, then point out that the principle of edification shows us that love really is about building up everyone in Jesus (you can segue immediately into the second point if you wish).

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Be One" by Natalie Grant
(*Be One*, Curb Records, 2015)
- ▶ "Until the Whole World Hears" by Casting Crowns
(*Until the Whole World Hears*, Provident Label Group, 2009)
- ▶ "Chosen Generation" by Chris Tomlin
(*Passion Awakening*, Sparrow Records, 2010)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "The Jesus Memo" *SkitGuys.com*

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1 Edification is one we reason we don't get raptured immediately after salvation (Phil. 1:25).

- ▶ Why do you think we don't immediately get raptured into heaven after we get saved?

Read Philippians 1:25.

- ▶ Look at the context before this verse. What dilemma does Paul face? Which would Paul prefer? So why does he end up choosing the other option?
- ▶ If Paul, the great apostle, thought edification was so important, should it be important to us, too? What would it look like in our lives if we took our individual edification this seriously? Give some real-life examples. What would it look like if we took the edification of other Christians this seriously?

2 The principle of edification guides us on what it really means to love people (Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:12,26).

- ▶ Have you ever been in a situation where it wasn't clear what the most loving action would be?

Read Romans 15:2 and 1 Corinthians 14:12,26.

- ▶ According to Romans, what qualification determines how we should "please our neighbor"? How is this a helpful qualification? Point out that if Paul only told us to please our neighbor, we could end up doing all kinds of things for others, even to the detriment of our own health and responsibilities.
- ▶ If you look at the context in 1 Corinthians 14 (especially verse 26), the people in Corinth had all kinds of spiritual gifts they wanted to exercise, to point of the service becoming chaotic. How does Paul help them organize and orchestrate their service?
- ▶ What could be some other examples of how doing all things for edification would guide otherwise-unclear choices?

3 Edification is a work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13-14; Phil. 2:12-13; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Read 1 Peter 2:5.

- ▶ Edification is a big deal because it builds an eternal house. How do you feel bearing this responsibility? How will you handle it?
- ▶ If you feel overwhelmed, there's good news! Look at the passive voice in 1 Peter 2:5. You are "being built up." Someone else is doing the building. Who might that be?

Read Romans 8:13-14 and Philippians 2:12-13.

According to Philippians, who is the one at work in you? God Himself, particularly the Holy Spirit. And according to Romans 8:13, what is one of the main ways He leads us? By helping us put our sins to death (i.e., to stop doing sin).

- ▶ How do you feel knowing that God Himself is working on us? So are we off the hook? Do we just slack off and let God work? If they say yes, point out the command of Philippians 2:12. No, we work hard. And we work hard because (note the word "for" at the beginning of verse 13) God himself is the one working in us. Wow!

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ How will you pursue your own edification this week?
- ▶ How will you pursue others' edification this week?
- ▶ Where will you find the strength to pursue edification? Hint: the Holy Spirit!

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of God's faithfulness. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: God is Faithful

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

Scripture: *Joshua 23:14; Lamentations 3:21-23; Matthew 8:5-10; Romans 4:20-21*

1 God is always and absolutely faithful (Josh. 23:14)

This first point might seem obvious, but we Christians can take God's faithfulness for granted. Many religions do not view their God as consistently faithful. Consider the whimsical favor of the Greek and Roman gods. Consider the often-changing nature of the Hindu gods. Islam's Allah is free to change his mind and rescind or alter his promises if he so wishes. But the Christian God is constant and unchanging in His faithfulness. His covenant name endures forever (Ex. 34:6-8).

2 When we trust God's faithfulness, we make much of His glory (Matt. 8:5-10; Rom. 4:20-21)

Matthew 8:10 says Jesus was amazed by the centurion. It's pretty impressive to amaze the God-man, especially in a good way. And how does the centurion do it? By recognizing and trusting Jesus' authoritative faithfulness. He trust Jesus' power so much it's not even necessary for Jesus to come to his house. And such faith makes Jesus look good. And so Jesus is amazed by it (Heb. 11:6). That's why Paul says in Romans 4:20-21 that when Abraham trusts God to do what God says He will do, Abraham gives glory to God. Our trusting in God's faithfulness makes much of His glory.

3 We can count on God's faithfulness even when He appears otherwise (Lam. 3:21-23).

The situation in Lamentations is bleak, to say the least. Jeremiah observes Jerusalem after the Babylonians have wreaked havoc on it and nearly destroyed it. Jeremiah himself is deeply despondent. Yet, like a beam of sunlight through a cloud, we find the middle of Lamentations 3 looking to God's faithfulness and finding hope therein. Because God is always faithful, we can trust him even when it appears otherwise. We might be condemned to jail like Joseph in Genesis 39, but we can trust that God is faithfully working for our good to exalt us in the proper time.

Opening Activity

Ask students to think of the most reliable thing in their lives. For good or bad, through thick and thin, what's the one thing or person on which you can absolutely count on? Give the students time to think and then time to share.

Point out that God is more faithful than all these things combined. The rising and setting of the sun has been going on for at least thousands of years without change, yet God's covenant faithfulness is more sure than the sun's course in the sky. (See Jer. 31:35-36; 33:25-26.)

If you have time, one alternative might be to ask each student to write down the most reliable thing they can think of on an index card. You can then have the entire class sort the index cards from most reliable to least reliable and see what they get. Then (if a student didn't already do it), you can place an index card labeled *God* on top of them all and explain how God is more certain than the stars in the sky, the passing of time, or the timing of Old Faithful.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Tell Your Heart to Beat Again" by Danny Gokey
(*Hope in Front of Me*, BMG Rights Management, 2014)
- ▶ "You Are Faithful" by Hillsong
(*Saviour King [Live]*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2010)
- ▶ "Never Once" by Matt Redman
(*Sing Like Never Before: The Essential Connection*, Sparrow Records)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Noah-God's Promise with Teaching by Chris Seay"
BluefishTV.com

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of God's faithfulness. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: God is Faithful

God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Apostle Paul linked the attribute of "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.

1 God is always and absolutely faithful (Josh. 23:14)

- ▶ Could God change the Ten Commandments? Why or why not? Could He alter the laws tomorrow so that petting cats became the most virtuous act possible, and feeding dogs was a sin?
- ▶ How do you know that in ten thousand years God won't get tired of us in heaven and decide to kick us all out?

Read Joshua 23:14.

God never changes. God never fails in any of His promises. He is completely faithful. Christians have a rather unique view of God in that we believe God's faithfulness is core to His character.

- ▶ Is there anything God cannot do?
- ▶ Read Titus 1:2. Are you surprised to know that God cannot lie? Any thoughts on why God cannot lie? Answer: because faithfulness is core to God's being.
- ▶ How should we react to God's absolute faithfulness?
We should be thankful, assured, and confident in Him.
- ▶ Human beings long for faithfulness and reliability. How could you use God's faithfulness to share the good news with non-Christians?

2 When we trust God's faithfulness, we make much of his glory (Matt. 8:5-10; Rom. 4:20-21).

- ▶ What do you think is the biggest compliment you could pay to someone?
- ▶ What do you think is the biggest compliment you could pay to God?

Read Matthew 8:5-10 and Romans 4:20-21.

- ▶ What "compliment" does the centurion pay to Jesus? How do his actions toward Jesus show he absolutely trusts Jesus' faithfulness?
- ▶ What "compliment" does Abraham pay to God? Hint: Verse 21 shows Abraham's trust in God's absolute faithfulness; verse 20 has another way of phrasing what Abraham did. Abraham gave glory to God (v. 20) by trusting God to do what He said He would (v. 21).

- ▶ So our living and behaving in light of God's absolute faithfulness magnifies Him. What are some specific promises from God we can count on? What are some specific examples of how we can make God look good by depending on those promises?

3 We can count on God's faithfulness even when He appears otherwise (Lam. 3:21-23).

- ▶ What are some situations or circumstances that commonly cause people to doubt God's faithfulness?
- ▶ What would you say to someone who asserts that God has not been faithful to her?

Read Lamentations 3:21-23.

- ▶ Before we look at these verses specifically, look at the context before and afterward. What kinds of emotions was this author (probably Jeremiah) experiencing? If you wish, fill the students in on the historical background of Lamentations.
- ▶ How does this author respond when God appears faithless?
- ▶ If we use Lamentations as a model, how should we respond when we suffer?
- ▶ Would you change your response to someone who asserts that God has not been faithful to her? If so, how? If not, why not?

Activity: Write a short note to yourself to put in an envelope labeled *To be opened in times of suffering*. In the note, record a few promises from the Bible and a few lines modeled on Lamentations telling yourself to bank on the faithfulness of God. If you are willing, you might read a section of your note to the group.

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ Jesus is the exact representation and image of God (John 1:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:2). How does He show God's absolute faithfulness?
- ▶ What aspect of God's faithfulness do you find most precious this week?

This midweek study will explore the implications of sin as rebellion against God. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Sin as Rebellion

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

Scripture: *1 Samuel 15:22-23; Isaiah 66:3; Jeremiah 2:12-13; John 19:15*

1 God wants our hearts, not just our bodies, to be submitted to Him (1 Sam. 15:22-23; Isa. 66:3)

Many worldly governments aren't concerned with our attitudes toward them as long as we obey and pay taxes. God, however, wants our entire being. To do what God wants with a resentful heart is just as bad as open rebellion. When Saul disobeys Samuel's command to slaughter all the Amalekites, Saul defends himself by claiming he kept the best animals to be offered as sacrifice. Samuel responds that God desires obedience more than sacrifice; that is, He wants our hearts more than He wants ritual followers. In fact, Isaiah equates empty obedience with ceremonially unclean acts! Not raising your fist to God isn't enough; He also wants us to open our hearts.

2 Our core rebellion is a refusal to be happy in our King (Jer. 2:12-13).

Jeremiah 2:12 sets up a big deal; it's so bad the heavens should shudder. What is that evil? Blaspheming God? Setting ourselves up as king? Fighting against God's will? No. It's going anywhere else for happiness besides God. It's going to the broken cistern of the world—whether it's gaming, Facebook, sports, music, popularity, or business success—and wanting to be satisfied. In other words, at the core of our rebellion is refusal to be happy in God. And the flip-side good news is that submission means finding our joy in God (Ps. 16:11; Phil. 4:4).

3 Sin is betraying Jesus and ourselves to submit to a lesser ruler (John 19:15).

The line the Jews give to Pilate in John 19:15 is particularly condemning. As good Jews, they should have no king but David and his descendants. Yet their hatred of Jesus is so strong they claim on Caesar as their king, thereby betraying their entire heritage. When we rebel against Jesus' kingship, we are also betraying ourselves, and all we were ever meant to be.

Opening Activity

Ask if anyone knows what a *taboo* is, or a *faux pas*. Once the term has been explained, ask the students to give any examples they can think of in our culture. After it's clear everyone has the concept, split the students into pairs. Have each pair come up with what they think is the biggest, gasp-inducing taboo or *faux pas* in our culture. Do your best to keep the students from coming up with inappropriate answers. Have them write down that *faux pas* on an index card. Collect all the index cards, mix them up, and then have the students sort the taboos from worst (most gasp-inducing) to best (least gasp-inducing).

Once they've finished their list, ask them where they think sin or rebellion against God should go on the list. Of course, it should be at the top, but chances are it's not. We tend to overlook sin and not be nearly as offended, hurt, or shamed by it as we should be.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Glory to God Forever" by David Crowder (*Hope Rising*, INO Records, 2009)
- ▶ "All My Fountains" by Chris Tomlin (*Passion: Here for You [Live]*, Sparrow Records, 2011)
- ▶ "Reign In Us" by Starfield (*I Will Go*, Sparrow Records, 2008)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "God of the Broken" *SkitGuys.com*
- ▶ "Stormie Omartian: Get Your Life Together" *BluefishTV.com*

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Essential Doctrine: Sin as Rebellion

Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.

1 God wants our hearts, not just our bodies, to be submitted to Him (1 Sam. 15:22-23; Isa. 66:3)

- ▶ *What does obedience to God look like?*

Read 1 Samuel 15:22-23 and Isaiah 66:3.

God never changes. God never fails in any of His promises. He is completely faithful. Christians have a rather unique view of God in that we believe God's faithfulness is core to His character.

- ▶ *Does anyone know the context of what Saul had just done?*

If a student knows, let him or her explain. If not, have them skim over the text (the three most important rules of Bible study are context, context, and context) to put the backstory together.

- ▶ *Do you think what Saul did constitutes "rebellion" against God? Why or why not?*
- ▶ *Why does the text condemn Saul?*

If necessary, explain to the students that Isaiah 66 talks about people engage in Hebrew temple-sacrifice practices (burning incense, killing an ox), but equating those practices with ceremonially unclean pagan activities (slaying people, offering swine's blood). Why would God be saying their acts of worship are that bad? What does God want from His people?

- ▶ *So sin is rebellion against God is largely a matter of the heart. Does this revelation make sin more or less frightening than if it were simply actions? Why?*
- ▶ *How should we respond to this understanding of rebellion?*

Lead the students to discuss that they should be pursuing heart obedience, not only external conformity. Be certain to mention that the Holy Spirit works in us to make a new heart (Ezek. 36:26).

2 Our core rebellion is a refusal to be happy in our King (Jer. 2:12-13).

- ▶ *What do you think God's biggest complaint is about the human race?*

Read Jeremiah 2:12-13.

- ▶ *According to this text, what is so atrocious that God thinks the heavens should shudder?*

You may need to explain the cistern/water images to the students; they may not immediately understand the connection between water and satisfaction.

- ▶ *According to this passage, what is the great act of rebellion we call sin?*

It's pursuing our happiness in anything but God.

- ▶ *Does this understanding of sin make sin more or less frightening? Why?*
- ▶ *So how we do keep from rebelling against God?*

By pursuing our happiness in God. Consider specific examples like loving people, musical worship, prayer, and Bible study. Also use "secular" pleasures as pointers to His goodness (1 Tim. 4:4-5).

3 Sin is betraying Jesus and ourselves to submit to a lesser ruler (John 19:15).

- ▶ *Whom does our rebellion against God harm?*

Read John 19:15.

- ▶ *Why is the Jews' claim that they have no king but Caesar such a big deal? If the students can't put it together themselves, lead them with questions like the following:*
- ▶ *How did the Jews view the Romans?*
- ▶ *If you asked any good Jew, who "should" be king?*
- ▶ *So why is it a big deal for the Jews to affirm no king but Caesar?*

In a very real sense, the Jews' claim that only Caesar was their king was a rejection of their very heritage. By rejecting Jesus' kingship, they were betraying themselves. How is our rebellion against God, in the end, suicidal?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How would you use the ideas from this week to help restore a backsliding Christian (1 John 5:16)? How could you use these ideas to help yourself stop rebelling against Jesus?*
- ▶ *What aspect of God's faithfulness do you find most precious this week?*

This midweek study will explore the reality of God's truthfulness. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: God is Truthful

The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is the Way, “the Truth,” and the Life (John 14:6).

Scripture: Numbers 23:19; Psalm 15; John 8:44; Ephesians 4:22; Hebrews 3:13; 6:18; James 5:12; Titus 1:2

1 God is truthful by His very nature

(Num.23:19; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2).

Truthfulness is a central tenet of God's character. Logically, it has to be. God Himself determines reality, so by His very nature, He must speak truth. As important as rational philosophy and logic are, what the Bible says is far more important, and it affirms that God cannot lie. When Balak tried to get Balaam to call God to curse the Israelites, no amount of money or human effort could get God to declare anything but the truth that He would bless Israel (Num. 23:19).

2 Satan and sin, unlike God, lie by their very nature

(John 8:44; Eph. 4:22; Heb. 3:13).

Truth is central to who God is, but lying is central to Satan's character and to the nature of sin. Ephesians 4:22 calls sin the “deceitful desires,” and Hebrews 3:13 warns about the “sin's deception.” Sin promises happiness, but it never delivers—it is a lie. Likewise, lying is so endemic to Satan that Jesus calls him the father of lies and says that when he lies, he speaks from his very nature (John 8:44).

3 We ought to be truthful

(Ps. 15; Jas. 5:12).

Truth-telling is not just an attribute of God; it's one of his core characteristics. So likewise, truth-telling should be central to us as Christians. Psalm 15 beautifully describes the God-fearing man. Note that he speaks truth in his heart (v. 2), from his very nature. He keeps his promises even when doing so will result in inconvenience and pain (v. 4). In fact, truth-telling should be such a central aspect of our person that James warns “above all else” for us not to swear (Jas. 5:12), but to let our yes be yes and our no be no so we can accurately show the world the truthful nature of God (2 Cor. 1:18-20).

Opening Activity

Ask your students the following question: Is God good because He adheres to justice, compassion, wisdom, and the like? Or are justice, compassion, wisdom, and the like good because God says they're good? In other words, is God good because He adheres to goodness, or is goodness good because God says so? If you wish, you could split your kids into two teams and assign each team a specific side. Give them a few minutes each to come up with arguments, and then let them make their case (this dilemma is called the *Euthyphro dilemma*, because Plato first proposed it way back in a dialogue with a man named Euthyphro).

After they've had their say, suggest that the truth is that this is like the chicken-or-the-egg argument. It's like asking if an ellipse is an ellipse because it's round, or if roundness is round because it coincides with being a portion of an ellipse. God is, by His very nature, good. One aspect of His goodness is His truthfulness. The Euthyphro discussion was important because we need to see that truthfulness, like all God's goodness, is part of His very essence, rather than a coexisting characteristic.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “Forever Reign” by Hillsong Worship
(*A Beautiful Exchange*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2010)
- ▶ “Trust In You” by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ “Like A Lion” by David Crowder
(*Passion: Awakening*, Sparrow Records, 2010)

Video Idea

- ▶ “Truth vs. Deception” *BluefishTV.com*

This midweek study will explore the God's truthfulness. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: God is Truthful

The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Heb. 6:18, Titus 1:2). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is the Way, "the Truth," and the Life (John 14:6).

1 God is truthful by His very nature (Num.23:19; Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2).

- ▶ Can God make a square circle? Could God make 2+2 equal 4? Suggest that God can only do what is true. Thus, He could not make a circular square because no such thing could exist (unless we changed our definitions). Let's see what the Bible says about God's truthfulness.

Read Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; and Heb. 6:18.

- ▶ *If God cannot lie, is He somehow limited? Is He no longer omnipotent?*
- ▶ *Does the fact that God never lies make you feel more or less comforted?*

2 Satan and sin, unlike God, lie by their very nature (John 8:44; Eph. 4:22; Heb. 3:13).

- ▶ How would you feel about a girl who always went back to a boyfriend who kept lying to her?

Read John 8:44; Ephesians 4:22; and Hebrews 13:3.

- ▶ *Why do you think we find sin so easy?*
Suggest that we find sin easy because it promises happiness; we think it's fun.
- ▶ *We feel bad or think less of a girl who constantly returns to her lying boyfriend. But sin constantly lies to us. It tells us we will be happy, but always lets us down eventually. How can we remind ourselves that sin's promises are lies?*
- ▶ *One way to combat sin is to find more happiness in God. What's one place where Jesus' truthfulness is particularly beautiful to you?*

3 We ought to be truthful (Ps. 15; Jas. 5:12)

- ▶ *Is it easier to lie or to tell the truth? Why?*
- ▶ *If there were one virtue you'd tell a new Christian to work on the most, which would it be?*

Read James 5:12.

- ▶ *James seems to think not swearing (i.e., we should consistently tell the truth in our everyday talk) is extremely important. Why do you think James insists on not swearing "above all"?*

Suggest to students that truth-telling should be central to our person, like it is to God.

Read Psalm 15.

- ▶ *What does it mean to swear to your own hurt? What would be example of it in our culture?*
- ▶ *How does Jesus exemplify Psalm 15? What are some specific examples of how we should model Psalm 15, especially the call to speak the truth always, in our culture?*
- ▶ *What are some places where it can be hard to tell the truth? How can we rely on the Holy Spirit to help us speak truth?*

Remind students of His in-dwelling and of His promises.

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How could we, with love and compassion, help each other be more truthful this week?*

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of God's omniscience. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: God is Omniscient

Scripture teaches that God is all knowing. He is the One who is “perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16), and this knowledge extends to all things past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all eternity whatever will come to pass. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.

Scripture: *Psalm 56:8; Isaiah 46:8-10; Matthew 6:8; 10:30; John 16:12; Romans 11:33-36*

1 God's omniscience should prompt us to be in awe of Him (Rom. 11:33-36).

In Romans 9-11, Paul discusses ethnic Israel's present partial hardening to the gospel. Theologians and Bible students have come to different conclusions about exactly what Paul is saying, but we can all agree on the way Paul closes this section of his letter—he praises God's magnificent wisdom to come up with the plan He has for ethnic Israel. Numerous theologians point out that *orthodoxy* (right teaching) should result in *orthopraxy* (right practice), and Paul demonstrates one example with his beautiful doxology here. The realization that God knows everything and has used that wisdom to orchestrate the events of all history in a way we couldn't begin to fathom (Eccl. 3:11) should prompt us to be in awe of Him.

2 God's omniscience should prompt us to trust Him. (Isa. 46:8-10).

As young children, we trust our parents and teachers because they know more than we do. In the military, subordinates trust their superiors because the superiors know the larger plan and strategy. Christians have a Father and Commander whose wisdom outshines any human intelligence. While this perfect wisdom could be used to make us miserable, God demonstrated His love by giving up His own Son on our behalf. Thus, we know that His wisdom is working for our good and we should trust Him to know better than us, and **obey His commands**.

3 God's omniscience should be a comfort to us like no other (Ps. 56:8; Matt. 6:8; 10:30; John 16:12).

An old song goes, “Nobody knows the trouble I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus.” When we think of God's omniscience, we think of His perfect knowledge of molecules, black holes, and string theory. But His omniscience also mercifully extends to our most intimate joys and pains. This great and awesome God also knows our pains in a way no one else in the world does or could.

Opening Activity

Ask your students to pretend they're cleaning out their grandparents' attic when they find a strange can. When they go to rub the can's label off to see what it is, a genie pops out. This genie, however, is not your normal genie; he's a very specialized, near-retirement genie. He can only grant one wish. And it's multiple choice: Would you rather have super-strength or super-intelligence? Which would be better? If you like, you can break your kids into smaller groups and have each of them put on a skit of what they would do with their super-strength or super-intelligence (they could also draw comic strips showing what they'd do). Either way, have them explain which they'd pick and why. Suggest that super-wisdom might get you further. Super-strength would be cool, but you could only affect things immediately around you. With super-intelligence, you could make long-term plans, set up traps, organize ways to feed the hungry, develop science, and/or make a lot of money. Lead into the idea that God' omniscience is something we don't always think of as much as His omnipotence, but it's a praiseworthy trait nevertheless.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “He Knows My Name” by Francesca Battistelli
(*If We're Honest [Deluxe Version]*, Word Entertainment, 2014)
- ▶ “He Knows” by Jeremy Camp
(*I Will Follow*, Sparrow Records, 2015)
- ▶ “Our God” by Chris Tomlin
(*Passion: Awakening*, Sparrow Records, 2010)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ “Can I trust God?” *BluefishTV.com*
- ▶ “What is God's Will?” *SkitGuys.com*

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of God's omniscience. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: God is Omniscient

Scripture teaches that God is all knowing. He is the One who is "perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16), and this knowledge extends to all things past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all eternity whatever will come to pass. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.

1 God's omniscience should prompt us to be in awe of Him (Rom. 11:33-36).

- ▶ *What's the coolest, most intricate story plot you've seen or read? It could be from a book or film or show. We want answers that show intelligence and planning, maybe involving surprising but cool plot twists.*
- ▶ *What made that plot so cool? How did you react to it?*

Read Romans 11:33-36.

- ▶ *Does anyone know what Romans 9-11 is about?*
If no one does, clarify to them that Paul has laid out how it might perceive to some as if God had failed (read Rom. 9:6: it is not as though the word of God has failed), but rather that He actually has a perfect plan involving ethnic Israel.
- ▶ *Why does Paul end this section with this beautiful doxology?*
- ▶ *By implication, how should we react to God's perfect wisdom?*
- ▶ *How can we know God's perfect wisdom is working for our good and not evil?*
He who did not spare His own Son for us will use His wisdom to love us. (See Rom. 8:32). It always comes back to Jesus!
- ▶ *How does God's wisdom compare to the story plots we shared earlier? If those plots got us excited, how should our hearts respond when we consider our God's perfect wisdom on our behalf?*

2 God's omniscience should prompt us to trust him (Isa. 46:8-10).

- ▶ *Who has a story of a time you didn't trust someone who knew better than you, and your lack of trust in them ended up hurting you?*
- ▶ *Who has a story of a time when you did trust someone who knew better than you, and it worked out to your benefit?*

Read Isaiah 46:8-10.

- ▶ *How do verses 9-10 support God's omniscience?*
- ▶ *According to verse 8, what should be our emotional response to verses 9 and 10? What should be our behavioral response? (Namely, to trust God).*

- ▶ *What are some specific examples of how we can trust God's omniscience?*

Usually, it'll mean obeying Him; for instance, honoring our parents (even if we think they're not smart), or not seeking revenge (even if we think the person really deserves it).

3 God's omniscience should be a comfort to us like no other (Ps. 56:8; Matt. 6:8; 10:30; John 16:12).

- ▶ *Who is someone who just knows you? Why or how do they know you so well?*
- ▶ *Do we tend to prefer people who know us or people who don't? Why?*
You might suggest as human beings, we desire the intimacy of being known.

Read Psalm 56:3; Matthew 6:8; Matthew 10:30; and John 16:12.

- ▶ *According to these texts, how well does God know you?*
- ▶ *What is your emotional response to the fact that God has kept each of your tears in a bottle? That the One who calls the stars out by name (Isa. 40:26) has numbered the hairs on your head? That He knows our needs before we ask? That He knows us so well, He knows when to share things with us and when to withhold things from us?*
- ▶ *If one of your non-Christians friends told you she was terrified that God knew everything about her, how would you respond?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *Psalm 139 is a psalm celebrating God's omniscience. Write your own brief psalm celebrating God's omniscience. If you're willing, please share it with the rest of us.*

This midweek study will explore the truths surrounding the biblical teaching of the temple of the Holy Spirit. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit indwells the church, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 12:13). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live lives differently than before, bearing the virtuous fruit that comes only by the indwelling work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This indwelling work of the Spirit also equips individual members of the church with gifts for the work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12:11).

Scripture: Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 1 Cor. 3:16:-17; 6:19-20; Eph. 4:4-8,11-13; Revelation 3:12

1 To be indwelt by God the Holy Spirit is a massive, marvelous mystery (Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Rev. 3:12).

Understanding the history of the temple helps us understand more of the image of us as God's temple. At both the initial erection of the tabernacle and the dedication of the temple, the glory of the Lord filled the structures with such magnificence and power that the priests were unable to minister. It was a big deal! And so to imagine ourselves as God's temple is to realize we have been filled with a wondrous, magnificent, glorious presence. We are part of something eternally significant.

2 As a temple of the Holy Spirit, our conduct ought to be holy (1 Cor. 3:16:-17; 6:19-20).

Being part of something compels our behaviors, attitudes, and words to be different. If you're part of a classy dance troupe, you'll act more classy. If you're part of a well-disciplined football team, you'll carry yourself with more discipline. So, to find out we're the temple of Almighty God should compel us to holier conduct and attitudes. We ought to walk more in line with who we truly are. God has made us His holy dwelling place; let's act like it!

3 As the corporate temple of the Holy Spirit, we pursue mutual edification (Eph. 4:4-8,11-13).

Solidarity is a term we don't use too much these days; it *means to be united with a common interest*. As Christians, we are in solidarity with one another. As fellow "bricks" in the temple of God, we seek to support and build one another. To tear one another down is to tear down the work of God and to tear down our own support system. To strengthen one another is to strengthen God's work and ourselves.

Opening Activity

Ask each student to use his or her phone to look up pictures of a few random building (famous or public buildings are preferable, such as government buildings, cathedrals, famous skyscrapers, opera houses, or similar structures). They should pick a favorite to share, but have a second or third back-up in case another student picks the same building. When each student has selected a building, they should take turns sharing the picture of the building, without sharing what the building is. The other students should take guesses figuring out the building's purpose. Eventually, have the student tell the building's name and function. Discuss how a building's function influences its form. We are also a building: the temple of God. How should our "function" as a building influence the way we "look" (i.e., conduct ourselves)?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Holy Spirit" by Kari Jobe
(*Majestic [Live]*, Sparrow Records, 2014)
- ▶ "Same Power" by Jeremy Camp
(*I Will Follow [Deluxe Edition]*, Sparrow Records, 2015)
- ▶ "Spirit Speaks" by All Sons and Daughters
(*Season One*, Integrity Music, 2012)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "A Prayer For Holiness" *SkitGuys.com*
- ▶ "Seek" *SkitGuys.com*

This midweek study will explore the truths surrounding the biblical teaching of the temple of the Holy Spirit. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit indwells the church, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 12:13). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live lives differently than before, bearing the virtuous fruit that comes only by the indwelling work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This indwelling work of the Spirit also equips individual members of the church with gifts for the work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12:11).

1 To be indwelt by God the Holy Spirit is a massive, marvelous mystery (Ex. 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Rev. 3:12)

- ▶ A common theme among movies and books is for a normal character to find out there is something extraordinary about them, whether it be a dormant super power or being a part of a royal heritage that was previously unknown. What other stories can you think of where someone finds out he or she is destined for greatness?
- ▶ Would you consider yourself to have greatness within? Why or why not?
- ▶ Would you consider yourself to be part of something great and glorious? If so, what?

Read Exodus 40:34-35 and 1 Kings 8:10-11.

- ▶ What happened when the tabernacle and the temple were first built?

Read Revelation 3:12.

- ▶ The Bible often refers to us as the temple of God. What is your emotional reaction to finding out you are indwelt by the glorious God who filled the tabernacle and the temple?
- ▶ Let's ask again and see if your answers are any different: Would you consider yourself to have greatness within?

Be sure to point out two cautions to the students: 1) their greatness is from God, not from themselves; 2) this greatness is only applicable to Christians.

- ▶ Would you consider yourself to be part of something great and glorious?

2 As a temple of the Holy Spirit, our conduct ought to be holy (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20).

- ▶ Have you ever been part of a team or other group that resulted in changed behavior? (Ex. My high school basketball team wore a coat and tie on game days and were very upstanding models for the school.)

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

- ▶ According to 1 Corinthians 3, why should Christians not tear one another down? According to 1 Corinthians 6, why should Christians be sexually pure?

In both cases, the answer is because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

- ▶ What connection does Paul make between our being a temple and the way we conduct ourselves?
- ▶ What specific attitudes or behaviors should we have (or not have) this week as temples of the Holy Spirit?

3 As the corporate temple of the Holy Spirit, we pursue mutual edification (Eph. 4:4-8,11-13).

- ▶ Imagine that you are a king or queen who recently overcame a rebellion in your kingdom. Years of civil war have finally ended thanks to your wise conquest. How would you celebrate?

Read Ephesians 4:4-8,11-13.

In Ephesians 4:4-8, Paul cites Psalm 68, which celebrated the king's victory in battle. According to this passage, how does Jesus celebrate His victory over sin and death? Answer: He gives spiritual gifts to His people, such as those listed in Ephesians 4:11-13.

- ▶ How does it make you feel to know that your spiritual gifts are entrusted to you by the victorious King as part of His glorious reign?
- ▶ How should we use our talents? In particular, how should we use our talents toward fellow Christians, other bricks and living stones in God's holy temple?
- ▶ How would you use the idea of us being the temple of the Holy Spirit to help two fighting Christians reconcile with one another?
- ▶ How do you (or could you) use your gifts to help build up God's temple, the church? Encourage students to exhort one another by explaining what gifts they see in one another.

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ Imagine our church did a sermon series on the temple of the God. The pastor asks you to come up with a motto or slogan to put on the advertising materials. What would you suggest?

This midweek study will explore the truths surrounding the biblical teaching of sin as selfishness. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Sin as Selfishness

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mindset that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mindset that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.

Scripture: *Genesis 3:5; Isaiah 14:13-14; 1 Corinthians 13:3-7; Philippians 2:3-11; 1 John 1:4*

1 Sin is selfishness in that it exalts oneself above God (Gen. 3:5; Isa. 14:13-14).

The cry of sin is, “I am autonomous!” That is to say, “I am my own authority!” Sin is selfishness in that sin is thinking we know what is best for us and acting accordingly, regardless of the way our actions affect God or others. In Genesis 3, the serpent tempts Eve by telling her that she will be like God. Isaiah 14 is explicitly directed at the king of Babylon, though many Christians think it is also directed at Satan. Whichever may be the case, Isaiah 14:13-15 makes clear the sin is exalting one’s own thoughts above God’s authority—the height of selfishness and foolishness.

2 Love is the opposite of selfishness in that it seeks its joy in the joy of others, not solely in itself (Phil. 2:3-11; 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

When we find something enjoyable, we often desire to share it. For instance, we want others to hear a song we like, and we want them to delight in the song as well. That’s what love is; it finds its joy in the joy of others. Just like it makes us happy to see others like the song we like, love finds its joy in seeing other people happy. Consider how Jesus empties Himself in Philippians 2 for the joy of seeing His people saved and happy in Him. Consider how 1 Corinthians 13 specifies that love is patient and does not seek its own. Love seeks **others’ joy**.

3 Love is not selfish, but it does profit the self (1 Cor. 13:3; 1 John 1:4).

Selfishness seeks happiness. Ironically, the path to happiness is love, not sinful selfishness. In 1 Corinthians 13:3, Paul indicates that if he does something with love, he actually gains profit. In 1 John 1:4, John writes his letter (a loving act) so that his joy may be made complete. How? By seeing his readers happy (3 John 1:4). Unselfish love is actually the path to happiness!

Opening Activity

Tell your kids that they are going to prepare short skits entitled, “A Day in the Life of a _____ Person.” Split them into a few small groups. Assign half of the groups “A Day in the Life of a Happy Person,” and the other half “A Day in the Life of a Selfish Person.” They should then prepare a short (one-to-two minute) skit showing said day.

Let them show their skits (note: if you have a smaller group, you can also have them draw “A Day in the Life of...”).

Afterward, debrief and look for patterns. How did the happy person interact with people? Did the happy person tend to give more or to receive more? How did the selfish person interact? Did he or she tend to give more or to receive more?

Segue into the idea that sin is largely selfishness, whereas selfless love often ends up leading to joy.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “Give Me Your Eyes” by Brandon Heath
(*What If We*, Provident Label Group, 2009)
- ▶ “Soul On Fire” by Third Day
(*Lead Us Back: Songs of Worship [Deluxe Edition]*, Provident Label Group, 2015)
- ▶ “Drops In the Ocean” by Hawk Nelson
(*Diamonds*, Fair Trade Services, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ “Choose Love” *SkitGuys.com*
- ▶ “Do You Love?” *SkitGuys.com*

This midweek study will explore the truths surrounding the biblical teaching of sin as selfishness. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: Sin as Selfishness

When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mindset that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be “curved inward” toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mindset that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.

1 Sin is selfishness in that it exalts oneself above God (Gen. 3:5; Isa. 14:13-14).

Read Genesis 3:5.

- ▶ The action that Eve did was simply to eat a fruit. How is that action sin? Where do you see selfishness in this verse?

Read Isaiah 14:13-14.

- ▶ This text is addressed to the king of Babylon (if necessary, explain what Babylon was); some Christians think it is also addressed to Satan. Either way, what did the perpetrator do that was so wrong, according to these verses? How is that action selfish?
- ▶ What actions or attitudes do we carry that say that we are more important than God or others?
- ▶ How does the world and culture around us perpetrate this attitude? How can we help ourselves and others combat it?

2 Love is the opposite of selfishness in that it seeks its joy in the joy of others, not solely in itself (Phil. 2:3-11; 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

- ▶ What is the coolest film/song/show right now? Who is the best athlete or team right now? What's the best restaurant or food? Why? (Let the students agree and get excited together. If these questions don't work, find something they can be happy about together).
- ▶ Why do you think we have this strong desire to share the things we find so enjoyable? Why must true happiness be shared? Ultimately, can happiness be selfish?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

- ▶ According to 1 Corinthians 13, what place does selfishness have with love?

Read Philippians 2:3-11.

- ▶ What characteristic of Jesus is Paul trying to pull out most strongly here? How is Jesus showing unselfishness to the greatest degree? How does Jesus exemplify 1 Corinthians 13:4-7?

- ▶ What are some real-to-life examples of what love looks like on the athletic field? In the classroom? In the cafeteria? In the dance studio? At the family dinner? At the restaurant?
- ▶ How do each of these examples promote the joy of others?

3 Love is not selfish, but it does profit the self (1 Cor. 13:3; 1 John 1:4).

- ▶ Do loving people tend to be happy people? Why or why not?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:3.

- ▶ If Paul does wondrous things but doesn't have love, what does he say happens? By implication, then, what should happen if Paul gives wondrously with love?
- ▶ What “gain” or “profit” might Paul get by loving unselfishly?

Read 1 John 1:4.

- ▶ This sentence might seem a bit odd. John is writing this letter to make his own joy complete. Is he writing this letter as an act of love? If so, how can he be unselfishly loving as he seeks to complete his joy? (You are welcome to use 3 John 1:4 as a hint).
- ▶ So what is the connection between love, happiness, and selflessness? (Answer: love is when you find your joy in the joy of another, just like Jesus did, just like Paul did; just like John did).
- ▶ What are some ways you already seek your joy in the joy of other people? What are some ways you can start seeking your joy in the joy of others?

WRAP IT UP

Have each student write down someone (teacher, friend, sister) on an index card. Mix the cards up and have each student draw a new card. Take turns with each student suggesting how to pursue their own joy in the joy of the person on their card.

This midweek study will explore the topic of the meaning of life. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: General Revelation

General revelation refers to God revealing Himself through His creation (Ps. 19) and through the human conscience (Rom. 2). Knowledge about God through general revelation is limited because it only communicates general knowledge about God and His character. We can look at the vastness and fine-tuning of the universe and recognize that God is all-powerful and wise, or look inward to our innate sense of right and wrong and know there is a moral lawgiver in the universe. General revelation is not sufficient for understanding how to know God or be saved, but it provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held accountable for suppressing God's truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1–2).

Scripture: *Psalm 19:1-4; Jeremiah 5:24; Romans 1:19-21; 2:14-15; Acts 14:17; 1 Timothy 4:4-5*

1 General revelation in creation undeniably demonstrates God's power and grace to us (Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:19-20).

I once got to hear a Holocaust survivor speak as a keynote address. He shared how his time in a Nazi concentration camp made him lose his faith in God. Years later, he returned to faith when he looked at the goldfish in his dentist's office. He remarked, "I looked at that fish and said, 'There's no way that's an accident. There must be a God.'" That little fish showed general revelation—the revealing of God's person in creation. Romans 1:19-20 asserts God's character is shown in Revelation. Jeremiah 5:24 and Acts 14:17 assert that the pleasure of natural gifts should point to the God who gives them.

2 Internal general revelation undeniably demonstrates God's moral code (Rom. 2:14-15).

God's revealing of Himself is not limited to external nature, though. Romans 2:14-15 reminds us that our consciences indicate the presence of God. To be sure, many people and cultures have different ideas of what is right and wrong, and our consciences can be twisted. But almost universally people agree there is objective right and wrong, with a fair degree of overlap on values. This universal conscience indicates a God from whom it originated.

3 General revelation becomes a means of grace for the Christian (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:21; 1 Tim. 4:4-5).

General revelation is a revealing. It generally shows us what God is like (we need the Scriptures and Jesus to know specifically what God is like). We can use it to experience God and show Him to others. The pleasure of an orange, a sunrise, or breeze is a reminder to Christians and a call to non-Christians to the majesty of God.

Opening Activity

Give index cards to the students. Ask each student to write down the name of an artist (in the most general sense of the term). It could be a singer, an actor, a poet, a painter, a sculptor, or a film director. You want them to pick someone who produces art in some way.

Collect the index cards. Mix them up. Then draw them out one at a time. After drawing each card, tell the group who the artist is. Ask them if they think that artist's work reveals his or her character, and if so, how.

Finish up by presenting the idea that a person's art, what he or she produces, reveals something about that person. However, the art may or may not be interpreted correctly. An artist's work might portray one idea, but because we haven't spoken to the artist directly, we might misinterpret it. The same idea is true of the Lord. His work in both creation and our consciences reveals much about Him. However, it is general revelation because it could be misinterpreted without the Bible to make it clear.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Canons" by Phil Wickham
(*Canons*, Fair Trade Services, 2007)
- ▶ "Reaching for You" by Lincoln Brewster
(*Real Life*, Integrity Music, 2010)
- ▶ "God of Wonders" by Third Day
(*Offerings II: All I Have to Give*, Provident Label Group, 2003)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Louie Giglio: Who is God?" *BluefishTV.com*

This midweek study will explore the topic of the meaning of life. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: General Revelation

General revelation refers to God revealing Himself through His creation (Ps. 19) and through the human conscience (Rom. 2). Knowledge about God through general revelation is limited because it only communicates general knowledge about God and His character. We can look at the vastness and fine-tuning of the universe and recognize that God is all-powerful and wise, or look inward to our innate sense of right and wrong and know there is a moral lawgiver in the universe. General revelation is not sufficient for understanding how to know God or be saved, but it provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held accountable for suppressing God's truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1–2).

1 General revelation in creation undeniably demonstrates God's power and grace to us

(Jer. 5:24; Rom. 1:19-20; Acts 14:17).

- ▶ *If you didn't have the Bible, what do you think you would know about God? Would you think He exists? That there is one of Him? That He is kind?*

Read Romans 1:19-20

- ▶ *According to Romans, what do all of us, deep down, know about God? How do we know so?*

Read Jeremiah 5:24 and Acts 14:17.

- ▶ *How do the good things and pleasures in our lives bear witness to God? Do we thank and honor him for these good things?*
- ▶ *Have you ever picked up or given hints to another person that you liked him or her? Did they get the message? If so, how? If not, why not?*
- ▶ *How is general revelation (God revealing Himself in nature) like "hinting" to someone? (Answer: You're not giving explicit clues, but you're giving implications that the other person can probably figure out).*
- ▶ *What do we need in addition to general revelation to truly and fully understand God? (Answer: The Scriptures).*

2 Internal general revelation undeniably demonstrates God's moral code (Rom. 2:14-15).

- ▶ *What are some values that almost all human cultures respect and hold?*
- ▶ *Why do you think all these different cultures hold these similar values?*

Read Romans 2:14-15.

- ▶ *What point is Paul making about the consciences of those who know the law "instinctively"?*
- ▶ *How did these moral laws get written onto the hearts of all men?*
- ▶ *Who in here is able to remember their dreams (as in waking-from-sleep dreams)? Is your memory of your dreams usually fuzzy or clear?*

Explain that the internal revelation of our conscience is kind of like a dream—we know we have it, and we get the big parts, but much of it is fuzzy or we lose it. Likewise, the internal revelation of conscience tells us there is a moral law and a moral law-giver, but we still need special revelation (the Bible) to understand Him fully.

- ▶ *What do we need truly to know God's law? (The Scriptures)*

3 General revelation becomes a means of grace for the Christian (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:21; 1 Tim. 4:4-5).

- ▶ *What are some appropriate, legitimate pleasures you really enjoy?*

Read Romans 1:21; Psalm 19:1-4; and 1 Timothy 4:4-5.

- ▶ *According to the Scriptures we just read, how should we view these pleasures? The pleasures we just described are also general revelation. They reveal God's character.*
- ▶ *How can we use the pleasures of general revelation to grow closer to God?*
- ▶ *How can we guard against making the pleasures of general revelation into idols?*
- ▶ *How can we use the pleasures of general revelation to help non-Christians know about God?*

WRAP IT UP

A theologian named John Calvin remarked that creation is God's theater. How are creation and conscience a display of God? Is there another analogy besides theater you would use? (For example, maybe we could view creation as God's instagram feed.)

This midweek study will explore the issue concerning the problem of evil. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: The Problem of Evil

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all loving, and knows everything, evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a “good” moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and secondly, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God’s character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Scripture: *Genesis 50:20; Psalm 119:75; Micah 6:8; Lamentations 3:20-26,31-33; Romans 8:32*

1 The argument that God can’t exist because of evil’s pervasiveness is self-referentially contradictory (Mic. 6:8).

This point is a bit more logical than theological, but it still holds: One has a very difficult time defining evil without God. To say that disasters and tragedies are evil presupposes a moral code and a moral code giver. Otherwise, tragedies and disasters are the result of random forces and as much a part of the universe as rain and sunrise. The fact that we feel evil occurrences ought to indicate to us that there is a God who determines what good and evil are. Therefore, if you say God can’t exist because evil does, you’ve presented an argument that eats its own tail.

2 The problem of evil fails to recognize God may have a bigger vision that we do not see (Lam. 3:20-26,31-33).

At the end of Job, God explains Himself to Job by listing off numerous animals in creation and pointing out that Job can’t understand how these animals work (see Job 37 and following chapters). God’s point is that if Job can’t even figure out these animals, he can’t figure out God. God is so much greater and bigger than we are, we fail to see what God sees—the entire mosaic of history. Consider how some of Jesus’ followers must have felt when they saw Him on the cross. What a tragedy! What a loss! They probably did not see the far greater vision of God using the worst event in history to redeem His people.

3 The cross is the greatest answer to the problem of evil (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 119:75; Rom. 8:32)

God does not explain Himself to us (Deut. 29:29). He does, however, assure us of His favor toward us in all circumstances by sending His Son to die on our behalf (Rom. 8:32). Since God gave us His very own Son, how could we not trust that He is always working for our good, however painful His sovereign prescription might be?

Opening Activity

Give your students an index card. Ask them to jot down an example of a great tragedy or evil that has happened to someone. They can make up their own, find a story on the Internet, or use something from a book or film. Collect the cards.

Split your students into groups of three. Bring your first trio to the front. Ask one of the students to draw a card. That student should then role-play being the person suffering from the tragedy on the card. The student should be questioning God’s existence or God’s love in light of this tragedy. The other two students should role-play ministering to that person and answering their questions. Repeat for the other groups.

Be sure to be sensitive. If your students have endured great evil, they may be uncomfortable doing this role-play; allow them to sit out quietly.

Debrief. Was it hard to answer the struggling person? Easy? Why or why not? Did anyone say something particularly helpful?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “Jesus, Son of God” by Chris Tomlin
(*Burning Lights*, Sparrow Records, 2013)
- ▶ “The Great I Am” by Phillips, Craig, & Dean
(*Breathe In*, Fair Trade Services, 2012)
- ▶ “Lift Your Head (Chains)” by Crowder
(*Neon Steeple*, Sparrow Records, 2014)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ “Prove It To Me” *SkitGuys.com*
- ▶ “The Weight of the Cross” *BluefishTV.com*

This midweek study will explore the issue concerning the problem of evil. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: The Problem of Evil

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all loving, and knows everything, evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a “good” moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and secondly, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God’s character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

1 The argument that God can’t exist because of evil’s pervasiveness is self-referentially contradictory (Mic. 6:8).

- ▶ Answer the following statement: True or false: This statement is false.
- ▶ Why is it impossible to answer the above statement?
- ▶ What is an example of something evil? How do you know it’s evil?

Read Micah 6:8.

- ▶ Often people read Micah 6:8 to focus on the simplicity of what God wants from us. Today, we want to focus on the first part of the verse. According to Micah 6:8, how do we know what is good and what is evil?
- ▶ If we get our understanding of good from God, how can some people claim God doesn’t exist because the world is too evil? How is their argument like the “This statement is false” problem?
- ▶ Is it possible to get true, objective good or bad values from anywhere besides God?
- ▶ So how is the problem of evil actually self-contradictory?

2 The problem of evil fails to recognize God may have a bigger vision that we do not see (Lam. 3:20-26,31-33).

- ▶ When have you changed your mind? It could be something big or small.
- ▶ Why did you change your mind? It’s likely that at least some of the time, we change our minds because we get more information.

Read Lamentations 3:20-26,31-33.

- ▶ Look at the context around our verses. What kind of emotional state is the writer in? You can also share the historical context of Lamentations and how Jerusalem has just been sacked by Babylon.
- ▶ Why does the Lamentations writer change his mind in verse 21?
- ▶ We often change our minds because we get additional information. How does the realization that there is almost certainly additional information that God sees (and we don’t) guard us against the problem of evil?

- ▶ Does Lamentations 3:33 give you assurance? Why or why not?
- ▶ How does someone claiming God can’t exist because of all the evil in the world actually show great arrogance? It assumes we know as much as or more than God does.

3 The cross is the greatest answer to the problem of evil (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 119:75; Rom. 8:32).

- ▶ What are some ways someone can prove his or her trustworthiness?

Read Psalm 15:4.

- ▶ How does someone swearing to their own hurt and not changing show he or she is trustworthy?
- ▶ When has someone proven his or her trustworthiness to you by suffering for you?

Read Romans 8:32.

- ▶ According to this magnificent promise (note that it’s a rhetorical question, which means its answer is a strong yes), how are we absolutely guaranteed that God is always working for our good? What well-known verse comes just four verses before this one?
- ▶ So how does God show His absolutely trustworthiness to us? How then can we answer the problem of evil? Put simply, how does Jesus’ dying for us assure us that God is working even evil for our good? Because Jesus’ death was the greatest evil ever done, and it worked for the greatest good ever.

Read Genesis 50:20 and Psalm 119:75.

- ▶ How can we know that we can say Genesis 50:20 and Psalm 119:75 in any circumstance?
- ▶ How could you use Romans 8:32; Genesis 50:20; or Psalm 119:75 to love yourself or someone else this week?

WRAP IT UP

The problem of evil is a real sticking point for many people. How could you lovingly use what you learned today to respond to someone struggling with the problem of evil?

This midweek study will explore the biblical doctrine of worship. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Worship

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship not only serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

Scripture: *Psalm 22:22-23,25; 117; 135:1-2; Hosea 6:6; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 14:24-25;*

1 Worship is joyfully giving God His proper place: the centerpiece of all things (Hos. 6:6; Rom. 11:36).

We typically use worship to refer to the musical events of our services. While this usage isn't inappropriate, it's helpful for us to remember worship is a matter of the heart. Worship occurs when we joyfully acknowledge God's proper place as the centerpiece of all things (Rom. 11:36). In terms of the actual corporate worship service, God is more concerned with our hearts being oriented toward Him than with our specific forms of worship (Hos. 6:6). However, God does want us to do worship in an orderly manner (1 Cor. 14:40).

2 Worship is both a personal and a communal activity (Ps. 22:22-23,25; 135:1-2).

It is the nature of human beings to wish to share their joy. When something makes us happy, we want other people to join in our happiness. We want to share the joke; we want to discuss the book with others; we feel a kindred spirit when so-and-so likes the same band we do. Similarly, our worship should be both personal and communal. We should find delight in who Jesus is and what He does, and we should desire to share that delight with others. This desire to share appears all over the Psalms, including Psalm 22 and Psalm 135.

3 Joyful worship is also a wondrous witness (Ps. 117; 1 Cor. 14:24-25)

Worship is God-oriented—it involves our hearts; it reaches out to share its joy with other worshipers; finally, it shines its light out to others. Imagine if aliens landed on earth and observed an Auburn football game (if not Auburn, insert your favorite sports team here). The excitement and enthusiasm with which the fans reacted to the game would clue in the aliens that something important is happening here. The same thing occurs in our corporate worship. The excitement and enthusiasm of our worship clues non-Christians in that something wonderful is happening.

Opening Activity

Explain the following to your students: At some point, you've probably received something that was "partial assembly required." If so, you probably also saw some fold-out instructions with whatever you got. In the past several years, as the world's diversity has become more prominent, I find fewer and fewer of those instructions are in words. Instead, they are a series of simple pictures illustrating what to do.

Your students' job is to create a small, fold-out instruction pamphlet for worship. If you had to make a simple-picture-no-words pamphlet on how to worship, what would it look like? I'd suggest your instructions consist of three pictures.

Give them time to draw their instructions and share them. Debrief by discussing what people drew. What do we think worship is? Use what they give, especially when it fits well with the lesson, as a segue into worship as a matter of the heart.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Lift My Life Up" by Unspoken
(*Unspoken*, Centricity Music, 2014)
- ▶ "One Thing" by Hillsong Worship
(*Open Heaven/River Wild [Live]*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2015)
- ▶ "This Is Amazing Grace" by Phil Wickham
(*The Ascension*, Fair Trade Services, 2013)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Worship Jesus" *SkitGuys.com*

This midweek study will explore the biblical doctrine of worship. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.

Essential Doctrine: Worship

While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship not only serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

1 Worship is joyfully giving God His proper place: the centerpiece of all things (Hos. 6:6; Rom. 11:36).

- ▶ How would you explain worship to a five-year-old?

Read Romans 11:36.

- ▶ What is God's place in the universe, according to Romans 11:36?

Read Hosea 6:6.

- ▶ According to Hosea, what is God's main concern when it comes to our worship? What makes our worship acceptable or unacceptable?
- ▶ Romans 11:36 said that all things were for God. How can a peanut butter and jelly sandwich be for God? How can your soccer game be for God? If they need help answering, suggest to them that all things exist to show how great God is. So their soccer game should show God's greatness and be done to magnify God. Same with peanut butter and jelly (and the gratitude we show when we eat it, or the way we share our sandwich with someone else who is hungry).
- ▶ So how can eating a sandwich be worship? Playing a sport? Playing an instrument?
- ▶ If everything we do can be worship, is it still important to have dedicated times of prayer and singing to Jesus and teaching about Jesus? Why?

2 Worship is both a personal and a communal activity (Ps. 22:22-23,25; 135:1-2).

- ▶ What's something you like that a friend of yours also likes? Does your mutual love of whatever-it-is cause you to be closer friends? Does your friend's love for whatever-it-is make you love whatever-it-is more or less?

Read Psalm 22:22-24,25; 135:1-2.

- ▶ How are these verses inviting others?
- ▶ Based on your mutual loves with your friend, and the calls to worship of Psalm 22 and Psalm 135, should worship be individual or communal?
- ▶ How does this understanding (that worship should include helping other people treasure Jesus) affect your attitude to church?

3 Joyful worship is also a wondrous witness (Ps. 117; 1 Cor. 14:24-25).

- ▶ When did you have an experience where you didn't want to do something at first, but someone convinced you it would be fun, and it turned out to be a blast? Be ready to share your own story, if possible. For me, it was go-karting as a kid. It looked so scary, but then when I did it, I enjoyed it!
- ▶ If you knew someone else enjoying the activity, were you more likely to try it yourself?

Read Psalm 117 and 1 Corinthians 14:24-25.

- ▶ According to 1 Corinthians 14, what could happen if a non-believer comes into a Christian corporate worship service? Why would the non-believer have this reaction?
- ▶ To whom is Psalm 117 addressed? (The nations.) Why would that audience be surprising and important in a psalm? (Most psalms were written for the Israelites; Gentiles and nations were outside God's covenant people).
- ▶ According to Psalm 117, why would the nations join in praising God? Answer: Because they see how great His lovingkindness is to Israel (see the word *for* at the beginning of verse 2. **How would the nations know about God's lovingkindness?** Answer: They would see the Israelites rejoicing in it.
- ▶ What should 1 Corinthians 14 and Psalm 117 look like today? In other words, how should non-Christians, by looking at our joyful worship, be drawn to the Lord? How is this like the activity you decided to try earlier?

WRAP IT UP

If you were to do a diagram instruction sheet for worship now (see the Opening Activity), what would you draw on it?