

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

Essential Doctrine: Justification by Faith

Justification refers to the moment a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ, not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

Scripture: Romans 4:1-11; 8:33-34; 5:16-19; Ephesians 2:8-9

1 Justification is a legal declaration of our standing in God's sight (Rom. 4:9-11; 8:33-34).

It's helpful to remember that justification isn't necessarily concerned with our nature, but with our status. If life is a baseball game, God is the umpire. Whatever the umpire says goes, regardless of what actually happened in the play. In the same way, once God has declared us righteous, no one can alter that ruling (Rom. 8:33-34). Note that Abraham was justified before he got circumcised (Rom. 4:9-11); in other words, he hadn't done everything right yet. But Abraham's actions were irrelevant; what mattered was God's declaration.

2 Justification is the concomitant of faith exercised by trusting in Jesus, not the result of good works (Rom. 4:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9).

Concomitant is a big word that means *necessary tag-along*. For example, fries are a concomitant of good burgers and peanut butter is a concomitant of jelly. Justification is a gift of grace, but faith is the concomitant to that grace (Eph. 2:8-9). The faith shows that we belong to Jesus, and thus have His righteousness. Paul went out of his way to make clear that Abraham did not do anything to earn justification; rather, Abraham believed on God; even more, Abraham believed on the God who declares the ungodly to be righteous. It'd be difficult to make it any clearer that justification rides on the steed of grace when the gate of faith is opened!

3 Justification is both the erasing of our sins and the imputation of Jesus' perfect righteousness (Rom. 4:6-8; 5:16-19).

Like a silver dollar has two sides, so does justification. On one side, all our sins are washed away. God declares us innocent, as celebrated in Romans 4:6-8. On the flip side, we are imputed (credited with) Jesus' perfect righteousness (Rom. 5:16-19). Just like Adam's sin is imputed to us as original sin, Jesus' perfect righteousness is also imputed to us. We're not just innocent; we're declared righteous.

Opening Activity

If weather permits, take your group cloud-gazing. Ask students to describe what they think different clouds look like. Ask them to explain why (e.g., that part of the cloud is the elephant's trunk, that part is the leg). Try to come up with different descriptors for the same cloud. Chances are, once one student explains how the cloud is a face, the other students will be able to see it. Draw a parallel to justification: Just as we sometimes can't see a cloud as a certain object until someone declares how the cloud is that object, justification is when God declares us righteousness, even though we may not look like it.

If you can't go outside, post cloud pictures or inkblot tests from the internet. Or make shadow puppets with flashlights in a dark room. Ask students to identify as many different things as they can from the same shadow (*It's a dog! A bunny!*). Connect how one person's declaration makes the shadow/ink blot clear to the rest of us; likewise, justification is a declaration of our standing before God.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Glorious Day (Living He Loved Me)" by Casting Crowns (*Until the Whole World Hears*, Provident Label Group, 2009)
- ▶ "Healing Begins" by Tenth Avenue North (*Light Meets the Dark*, Provident Label Group, 2010)
- ▶ "Forever" by Kari Jobe (*Forever (Live)*, Sparrow Records, 2014)
- ▶ "All He Says I Am" by Gateway Worship (*Forever Yours [Live]*, Gateway Music, 2012)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Iodine" BluefishTV.com

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Essential Doctrine: Title

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1 Justification is a legal declaration of our standing in God's sight (Rom. 4:9-11; 8:33-34).

- ▶ *Imagine a baseball game. If the pitcher throws a ball, but the umpire calls it a strike, which is it? Note: If you would rather use another sport, go for it.*
- ▶ *What are some other situations in which it's not so much what actually happened that matters, but what authority figures declares happened?*

Read Romans 4:9-11.

According to the text, was Abraham justified when he was circumcised or uncircumcised? If Abraham was uncircumcised, had he done everything necessary for righteousness? So in actuality, was Abraham righteous or not?

- ▶ *How is justification like the umpire's call?*
- ▶ *Have you ever seen a coach argue with an umpire about a call? How did it turn out?*

Read Romans 8:33-34.

According to this text, once God has declared us righteous, can anyone ever declare us otherwise? Just like the coach's argument doesn't work, no one's statement can ever change God's mind.

2 Justification is the concomitant of faith exercised by trusting in Jesus, not the result of good works (Rom. 4:1-5; Eph. 2:8-9).

- ▶ *What are some things that have to go together?*
- ▶ *What are some things that do not go together well?*

Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

- ▶ *According to this text, how are we justified?*
- ▶ *What are the paired-up things in this text? What makes justification happen?*
- ▶ *What does Paul point out as not paired-up in this text? Why are works excluded?*

Read Romans 4:1-5.

- ▶ *What themes from Ephesians 2 are repeated here?*

- ▶ *How does verse 5 especially capture the essence of justification? (Hint: Whom does God declare to be righteous?)*

3 Justification is both the erasing of our sins and the imputation of Jesus' perfect righteousness (Rom. 4:6-8; 5:16-19).

- ▶ *Make up an analogy for justification based on what you know of it so far. Justification is like X because...*
- ▶ *What would you say? Why?*

Read Romans 4:6-8.

- ▶ *Here Paul quoted David in Psalm 32. What particular blessing was David celebrating?*

Read Romans 5:16-19.

- ▶ *This passage is a little more complicated. What blessing was Paul talking about for those who are justified? (Hint: He drew a comparison between how Adam's sin passes on to us with something else.)*
- ▶ *Was Paul talking about the same blessing in Romans 4:6-8 and 5:16-19? If so, how are they the same? If not, what is the difference between the two blessings?*

I'd suggest that Paul is talking about two distinct-but-connected blessings of justification: We are made innocent (Rom. 4:6-8), and we are made righteous (Rom. 5:16-19).

- ▶ *Does this dual blessing make justification lesser or greater?*
- ▶ *So justification is like a coin with two sides, or a highway with two directions. Can you make any other analogies for the double-blessing of justification?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *If our knowledge of something doesn't lead us to worship, to treasure Jesus more, we don't truly understand it. How does this explanation of justification cause you to treasure Jesus more?*

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to recognize that all humanity has inherited a sin nature that can only be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Body of Christ

The New Testament describes the church as the body of Christ. The church lives and operates as Christ's representative here on earth, with Christ as its head (Col. 1:18). This means the church is an extension of Christ's ministry, carrying out His work by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). The picture of the church as the body of Christ also shows us the connection between individual Christians as members depend on each other for growth and sanctification (1 Cor. 12).

Scripture: *Matthew 28:18-20; John 2:21; 9:4; 1 Corinthians 6:15,19-20; 12; Ephesians 4:7-8; Colossians 1:18*

1 The church is Jesus' physical representation here on earth (John 2:21; 1 Cor. 6:15, 19-20; Col. 1:18).

In a real sense, Christians are the body of Jesus. The connection between the believer and Jesus is so intimate that Paul said we are members of His body. Paul went on to say our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and do not belong to us (1 Cor. 6:19-20), just like Jesus said His physical body was the temple (John 2:21). Of course, Jesus Himself is the head of this body (Col. 1:18), which reminds us of how mighty and glorious it is to be united to Him.

2 The church is an extension of Jesus' ministry, especially by carrying out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; John 9:4).

Since Christians are the body of Christ in a physical sense (remember, Jesus has His distinct human body), they are also the body of Christ in a missional sense. Jesus has ascended to heaven, but will one day return. For now, we are to carry out His work while it is still day (John 9:4). The specific work He has given to us is often referred to as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20): making disciples of all nations.

3 The church as Jesus' body shows the way individual Christians are connected with one another (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:7-8).

There are no lone-ranger Christians. In the same way God has many excellencies, He has distributed many gifts among His people (Eph. 4:7-8). Since we each have different gifts, we depend on one another to work together for mutual growth in Christ and service to the currently unbelieving world. Some Christians are skilled speakers or mechanics, while others are talented artists or cooks. We must all work together to build one another up and show the world Jesus.

Opening Activity

For this activity, you'll need a larger room, some un-inflated balloons, and several chairs. Place students into groups of three and instruct them that their group's goal will be to pop as many balloons as possible in one minute.

One student will be at one end of the room blowing up balloons and tying them. A second student must run the balloon from that student to the popper. The popper, the final student, will be seated on a chair at the opposite end of the room. The popper can only pop the balloon by sitting on it. Students can decide within their own groups who plays which part. Be sure each group has sufficient balloons, then start the timer, stopping after one minute.

Once the game is done, debrief. Notice how each student played a specific role (Hopefully, the role they were best at). In the same way, each person in the body of Christ plays an important, interdependent role. There was probably one person who was in charge. In the same way, Jesus is the head over the church. Make any other possible connections to the body of Christ.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "All We Sinners" by Crowder
(American Prodigal [Deluxe Edition], sixsteps/sparrow records, 2016)
- ▶ "Make Us One" by Jesus Culture
(Love Has A Name [Live], Sparrow Records, 2017)
- ▶ "All the People Said Amen" by Matt Maher
(All the People Said Amen [Live], Provident Label Group, 2013)
- ▶ "Even So Come" by Passion
(Even So Come [Live], sixstepsrecords/sparrow records, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "The Body of Christ" *BluefishTV.com*

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1 The church is Jesus' physical representation here on earth (John 2:21; 1 Cor. 6:15, 19-20; Col. 1:18).

Imagine your car is rear-ended by another car. What would you say the other car did to your car? (He or she hit me!) But did the other car actually hit you? Your body? What did they actually hit? So why do we say, "They hit me"?

- ▶ Can you think of any other examples where what we are operating is so intimately connected to us that when someone does something to that thing, we say people have done it to us?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.

You may want to prep your students by asking for maturity in dealing with this subject matter.

- ▶ What does this text say about us in relation to Christ?
- ▶ Why did Paul say it is wrong to unite with a prostitute sexually? Who do we really defile by doing so?
- ▶ What did Paul call our bodies in verse 19?

Read John 2:21.

- ▶ What did Jesus have in mind when He spoke about the temple He would raise? How does this temple overlap with the temple in 1 Corinthians 6:19?

Read Colossians 1:18.

- ▶ What is the most glorious and wonderful thing you get to be part of? If we are the body, what is Jesus?

2 The church is an extension of Jesus' ministry, especially by carrying out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; John 9:4).

- ▶ Who built the wall around Jerusalem in the Book of Nehemiah?
- ▶ Who built the first temple? Who built the temple mentioned in the gospels?

Solomon and Herod, respectively.

- ▶ Did these men individually build these temples? Did they lay every brick, hammer every nail? So in what sense do we say that they "built" these temples?

- ▶ Can you draw a parallel with how Jesus is the head architect who instructs us on how to carry out His blueprints and design?

Read John 9:4.

- ▶ What was Jesus emphasizing about the disciples' timeline (and ours) for working?

Read Matthew 28:18-20.

- ▶ What specific tasks did Jesus give to His body to do? Any specific suggestions on how you can accomplish this commission this week?

3 The church as Jesus' body shows the way individual Christians are connected with one another (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:7-8).

- ▶ Play movie credits from any big movie and ask students to try to keep track of the following: How many people made the movie and specific names of people and what they did.
- ▶ How many people did it take to make this film? Were they all truly part of the movie, even the caterer?; What names do you remember? What was this person's specific job?; What would happen if some of these people switched jobs?

Read 1 Corinthians 12.

Read as much of the chapter as possible for your group.

- ▶ How is the body of Jesus like all the people who make a movie?
- ▶ Are there any unimportant people in making a movie? Are there any unimportant parts in the body of Christ?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ What is the most important group you belong to? How does it parallel being part of the body of Christ? How can you use your gifts this week to build up the body and carry out Jesus' commission?

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

Essential Doctrine: God is Just

God establishes standards for His moral creatures that are in accordance with His righteousness, and they will be judged according to those righteous standards (Lev. 11:44-45; Rom. 2:5-11; 2 Cor. 5:10). It would be an injustice if God did not uphold His righteousness, because such a failure would require God to violate His own righteous character. Since humanity has sinned by failing to live up to God's righteous standards, God has taken it upon Himself to make provision by being both just and the justifier of those who place their faith in Christ (Rom. 3:25-26).

Scripture: *Leviticus 19:15,35-36; Proverbs 11:1; 20:10,23; 31:8-9; Isaiah 40:10; Romans 3:22-26*

1 God is just by nature and thus the basis for all justice (Lev. 19:35-36; Prov. 11:1; Isa. 40:10).

A truth we may take for granted is that God's justice is part of His being. We could have a God who is arbitrary or who is more concerned with might than with right. But we do not. We have a God who called the Israelites to imitate His holiness by their just dealing with one another (Lev. 19:35-36). As part of His just nature, He will repay all with fairness (Isa. 40:10). Justice is so core to His being that even injustice in economics is detestable to Him (Prov. 11:1).

2 The crucifixion shows how precious justice is to God (Rom. 3:22-26).

Relatively few of us in the West recognize the difficulty posed by God's forgiving sinners. If God truly is just, how can He forgive sinners? Isn't His overlooking the sin of believers and not counting it against them a huge moral failure? After all, no human judge could exonerate a convicted criminal and still be considered worthy of the bench. Paul untangled this knot with Romans 3:22-26. The cross shows God's justice; God did not simply sweep sin under the rug. Rather, He displays the depth of His love for justice in the horrific punishment inflicted on the holy Son of God in the cross. This graphic display—at the cost of His Son—shows how highly God values justice.

3 We should reflect God's justice in our lives and society (Lev. 19:15; Prov. 20:10,23; 31:8-9).

As God's people, we should reflect His justice. We should be fair in our business dealings (Prov. 20:10,23). We should pursue justice in court, regardless of the status of the defendant and plaintiff (Lev. 19:15). And we should work toward racial and economic justice too (Prov. 31:8-9).

Opening Activity

Imagine a group of friendly aliens has landed near your church. They've come to your group to ask them to prepare them a "time capsule" that the aliens will return to their home planet. Specifically, the aliens are really interested in this idea of *justice*. They want your group to gather stories of people who display this idea of justice so the aliens can better explain it to their people. Students can use examples from history, movies or comics or books, or they can use specific people. Ask students to compile what they find (pictures on their computers or phones would be great) and explain why they want to submit those ideas in the "justice capsule."

Use what they come up with to discuss their ideas of justice. *What is it? How does it come about? Why do we have it?* Use the discussion to segue into the lesson.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Let My People Go (Live)" by Matt Redman
(Your Grace Finds Me [Live], sixstepsrecords/sparrow records, 2014)
- ▶ "Kyrie Eleison" by Keith & Kristyn Getty
(Hymns for the Christian Life [Deluxe Version], Getty Music Label, 2012)
- ▶ "Shout" by Passion
(Let the Future Begin [Deluxe Edition], sixstepsrecords/sparrow records, 2013)
- ▶ "Wonder" by Passion
(Even So Come [Live], sixstepsrecords/sparrow records, 2015)

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1 God is just by nature and thus the basis for all justice (Lev. 19:35-36; Prov. 11:1; Isa. 40:10).

- ▶ *When did something unfair happen to you? What made it unfair? How would things have gone if the situation had been fair?*
- ▶ *Why do we expect things to be fair? Why shouldn't it be the case that people should be able to do whatever they can get away with?*
- ▶ *Imagine you journeyed to a remote island and discovered a culture that had no concept of justice; people were allowed to do whatever they wanted and could accomplish. How would you go about changing them?*

Read Leviticus 19:35-36.

- ▶ *What is the final sentence of this passage? How does the phrase "I am the Lord" connect to the command to be just? Who is the most just being in the universe?*

Read Isaiah 40:10.

- ▶ *According to this passage, what is God bringing with him? What must be true about God's character if He is bringing appropriate wages with him?*

Read Proverbs 11:1.

- ▶ *What does detestable mean? What is something that is detestable to you?*
- ▶ *The scales Proverbs mentioned were used in measuring out grain; in other words, in business transactions. How would dishonest scales favor a merchant?*
- ▶ *How does God feel about dishonest scales? Why is this not only wrong, but completely detestable to Him?*
- ▶ *What can we conclude about God's character? How might the world have been different if God had not held justice so closely?*

2 The crucifixion shows how precious justice is to God (Rom. 3:22-26).

- ▶ *Show students a picture of the crucifixion. Ask them to come up with a list of the attributes of God they see reflected in the crucifixion (not necessarily the picture, but in the historical event).*
- ▶ *How does the crucifixion show the traits you've listed?*
- ▶ *Did anyone come up with justice?*
- ▶ *Could God have simply forgiven us without sacrificing Jesus? If yes, why didn't He? If no, why couldn't He?*

Read Romans 3:22-26.

- ▶ *Paul was concerned with showing God's righteousness (in other words, His justice). According to verse 25, what apparent injustice had God been committing before the crucifixion?*
- ▶ *How did the crucifixion "correct" this injustice (v. 26)?*

3 We should reflect God's justice in our lives and society (Lev. 19:15; Prov. 20:10,23; 31:8-9).

- ▶ *What are some examples of things in your life that you think are unjust?*

Read Proverbs 20:10,23.

- ▶ *What area of life do these Proverbs address? Can you give an example of justice in business?*

Read Leviticus 19:15.

- ▶ *How are our current courts sometimes unjust? How did they get that way? How can we fix them?*

Read Proverbs 31:8-9.

- ▶ *What are some people groups who cannot speak out for the injustice they experience? What can we do to help them in the name of Jesus?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *What is one way you value Jesus more from our discussion of justice? What can you do this week to be more just in your own life? How can you further justice in our society or world this week?*

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

Essential Doctrine: People of God

Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). The church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ and is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The term church is used in two senses. Church refers to individual local churches composed of people who have united together under the lordship of Christ and the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God's ruling care while He protects and cares for us.

Scripture: *Psalm 16:3; Isaiah 43:7,21; John 17:24; Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 10:1; Ephesians 4:25; Hebrews 2:11-12; 10:24-25*

1 The story of the entire Bible is about God making a people to enjoy Him (Isa. 43:7,21; John 17:24).

God made us to enjoy His glory. One of the most-repeated phrases of the Bible is essentially "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12; Deut. 29:13; 1 Chron. 17:22; Jer. 7:23, 11:4; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 34:30-31; Hos. 2:23; Zech. 8:8; 13:9; Rev. 21:3). While we do emphasize personal salvation, it's also right to see the Bible's emphasis on us as a collective group made to display and enjoy God's excellence (Isa. 43:7,21). We are the people God has given to Jesus so that we might see His glory and enjoy it forever (John 17:24).

2 All Christians are intimately connected to the lineage of the people of God (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:25; Heb. 2:11-12).

Paul affirmed that because we are all members of Christ's body, we are members of one another (Rom. 12:4-5). The reason he gives us to be honest with one another is because we are members of one another (Eph. 4:25). In a mysterious, real way all believers across space and time are connected to one another under the headship of Jesus. To add to the mystery, note how in Jesus was not ashamed to call us brothers, but rejoices among us (Heb. 2:11-12). If Jesus isn't ashamed to call us brothers, none of us ought to be ashamed of one another.

3 All Christians should be connected to a local congregation of the people of God (Ps. 16:3; Heb. 10:24-25).

Since we are objectively connected to other Christians in Christ, we should live in such a way that shows that connection. In other words, we should pursue membership and contributions to a local congregation as a representation of the collective people of God. David other believers were all his delight (Ps. 16:3), and we ought to want to join with them to help one another pursue holiness (Heb. 10:24-25).

Opening Activity

Invite students to imagine they work as event planners. Here is their latest assignment: siblings who were separated at birth are about to be re-united. Their job is to plan the siblings' first two days together. Your goal is to make events and opportunities that will allow them to re-connect, get to know one another, appreciate one another, and, hopefully, love one another.

Allow students time to make their plans, and then ask them to share. Why did they choose the events they chose? Did they focus on the siblings doing fun things together? Did they make lots of down time for discussion and catching up? Or did they plan times for service together?

Whatever their plans, point out that we sort of have the same things in our lives: The people of God are our brothers and sisters. Do we take (or make) opportunities to get to know our spiritual siblings? How could we do better at loving one another this week?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "All Over the World" by Matt Redman
(*Beautiful News [Bonus Track Version]*, Survivor Records, 2006)
- ▶ "Tears of the Saints" by Leeland
(*Sounds of Melodies*, Essential Records, 2006)
- ▶ "Wake Up" by All Sons & Daughters
(*Live [Deluxe EP]*, Integrity Music, 2013)
- ▶ "Empires" by Hillsong UNITED
(*Empires*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "This is Church" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "Beyond Our Walls" *BluefishTV.com*

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1 The story of the entire Bible is about God making a people to enjoy Him (Isa. 43:7,21; John 17:24).

- ▶ How would you summarize the entire Bible into a sentence or two?
 - ▶ What's so great about having your sins forgiven? What good does justification ultimately provide?
- Ask students to look up as many of these verses. I suggest one verse per student:
- Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 29:13; 1 Chronicles 17:22; Jeremiah 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1,33; Ezekiel 11:20; 14:11; 34:30-31; 36:28, 37:23,27; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 8:8; 13:9; and Revelation 21:3.
- ▶ What common phrase or theme do you hear?
 - ▶ What does it mean for God to be our God? How is this good news (Isa. 52:7)?
 - ▶ What does it mean for us to be His people? How is this good news?
 - ▶ Why did God make us in the first place?

Read Isaiah 43:7,21.

- ▶ According to Isaiah, why did God make us? How can we be "for his glory"? Where does our happiness fit in?

Read John 17:24.

- ▶ What was Jesus' request in His high priestly prayer? How will we feel when we finally behold His glory?

2 All Christians are intimately connected to the lineage of the people of God

(Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:25; Heb. 2:11-12).

- ▶ To whom do you feel closest? Why do you feel so close those people?
- ▶ What are some common bonds that draw people together?
- ▶ What do you think could be the closest bond between a group of people? Race? Background? Culture? Love of particular artist, band, or sports team? Explain.

Read Romans 12:4-5.

- ▶ According to Romans, how are we connected to one another? Can you think of a bond that be closer than this bond?

Read Ephesians 4:25.

- ▶ What was Paul's reasoning for why we should be honest to one another? What happens if the parts of your physical body aren't honest to one another (e.g., your mind tells your right hand to scratch your knee, when your knee actually has a big bruise)?

Read Hebrews 2:11-12.

- ▶ What is our relationship to Jesus? How does Jesus feel toward us?
- ▶ How should we feel toward one another? What should we do together?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1.

- ▶ What is the relationship between Christians and Old Testament saints? How does this passage show that we are connected to saints across both time and space as the people of God?

3 All Christians should be connected to a local congregation of the people of God (Ps. 16:3; Heb. 10:24-25).

- ▶ If you could join any group of people in the world, what group would you join? Why?
- ▶ How do you feel about being part of the people of God? Proud? Ashamed? Indifferent? Excited? Hopeful? Depressed?

Read Psalm 16:3.

- ▶ How did David feel about the people of God? How should we feel about them? If we aren't delighted in God's people, who can we ask to change our hearts?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

- ▶ What does Hebrews say we should not neglect? Why should we gather together (v. 24)?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ How will you view and treat fellow Christians this week? Be specific!

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to recognize that all humanity has inherited a sin nature that can only be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: God is Love

Saying God is love means God is the essence of love or that perfect love resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. God's greatest act of love toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

Scripture: Psalm 16:2; 43:3; Matthew 3:17; John 8:29; 1 Corinthians 13:3; Philippians 2:2; 1 John 1:3-4; 4:8; 1 Peter 3:18

1 Love is when you find your joy in the joy of another person (Phil. 2:2; 1 John 1:3-4).

I'd present love as the happiness we experience at the happiness of others. Put simply: Love is when it makes you happy to see someone else happy. Paul asked the Philippians to complete his joy by pursuing peace with one another (Phil. 2:2). And John said he wanted his readers to join his fellowship with God, so that he (John) could have complete joy (1 John 1:3-4). Both men pursued their happiness in the happiness of their readers.

2 True love compels us to imitate the Godhead's love for one another by joyfully pursuing other people's joy (Matt. 3:17; John 8:29; 1 Cor. 13:3; 1 John 4:8).

God inherently *is* love because each person of the Godhead finds happiness in the happiness of the others (Matt. 3:17; John 8:30). Since love is so inherent to God's nature, John could say that anyone who truly knows God will imitate God in joyfully pursuing the happiness of others (1 John 4:8). We will not be comfortable only with our own happiness, but we will seek joy by spreading the happiness Jesus offers to others (1 Cor. 13:3).

3 God's greatest act of love is giving us Himself, because He alone can ultimately satisfy us (Ps. 16:2; 43:3; 1 Pet. 3:18).

The greatest love will pursue the loved one's greatest happiness, and the thing that will make us happiest is God Himself (Ps. 16:2; 43:4). Jesus died to bring us to God (1 Pet. 3:18). He wants us to have what will make us happiest: Himself. In the same way, we ought to seek our happiness by bringing people to God, so they can be happy, and we can be happy in their happiness.

Opening Activity

Ask students to find (or draw) pictures they could use in the Illustrated Dictionary for the word *love*. Ask them to explain why they presented the pictures they did. Take note of what emotions the faces in their pictures display.

Ask any students who feel comfortable to come up with a definition of love. (We're not talking about only romantic love here, but love in all its facets: within the family, across the community, across the globe, between God and Christians, etc.).

Ask if the definition works for the following loving relationships:

- ▶ parent/child
- ▶ siblings
- ▶ between spouses
- ▶ God/Christian
- ▶ pastor/congregant
- ▶ God the Father/God the Son

Discuss what works in the definitions and pictures they've come up with. Discuss where any of the pictures and definitions come short (e.g., they don't capture the love of siblings, or of the Father for the Son). Can you come up with any corrections or clarifications?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "What Love is This" by Kari Jobe
(*Where I Find You*, Sparrow Records, 2012)
- ▶ "Greatest of These" by Hillsong UNITED
(*Wonder*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2017)
- ▶ "You Are Love & Love Alone" by All Sons & Daughters
(*Poets & Saints*, Integrity Music, 2017)
- ▶ "Joy Pours Out" by Christy Nockels
(*Be Held: Lullabies for the Beloved*, Keeper's Branch Records, 2017)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Love Anthem" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "Love What Matters" *Skitguys.com*

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1 Love is when you find your joy in the joy of another person (Phil. 2:2; 1 John 1:3-4).

- ▶ True or false: In order for an act to be loving, the person doing the act has to be happy when he or she does it.

Read Philippians 2:2.

- ▶ What did Paul want the Philippians to do? What motivation did he give them at the start of the verse?
- ▶ Was it selfish for Paul to be pursuing his own happiness in this passage? Why or why not?

Read 1 John 1:3-4.

- ▶ What did John want for his readers? Why did he want it?
- ▶ Was it selfish for John to want his own joy to be complete? Why or why not?
- ▶ When we love someone like the apostles loved their readers, how are we pursuing our happiness? In love, what is the relationship between the lover's happiness and the loved one's happiness?

2 True love compels us to imitate the Godhead's love for one another by joyfully pursuing other people's joy (Matt. 3:17; John 8:30; 1 Cor. 13:3; 1 John 4:8).

- ▶ What does it mean when the Bible says God is love?
- ▶ Did God love anyone before He created the angels and the rest of the world? Whom did God love then?

Read Matthew 3:17 and John 8:30.

- ▶ How does God the Father feel about God the Son (Matt. 3:17)? How do you think this makes God the Son feel?
- ▶ What kind of things does Jesus do (John 8:30)? Why? Do you think Jesus does these things joyfully or begrudgingly?
- ▶ What can we conclude about the Trinity's love for one another?

Read 1 John 4:8.

- ▶ Considering what we learned about God's love within the Trinity, why is it impossible for someone to know God without also loving like God?

- ▶ When Jesus pursues our good, does He do so joyfully or begrudgingly? (Hint: look at Heb. 12:2.) So what emotion should mark our attitudes when we love people (when we pursue their happiness)?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:3.

- ▶ What is the consequence if we give everything away but don't have love?
- ▶ What exactly do we gain if we give away everything with love?

3 God's greatest act of love is giving us Himself, because He alone can ultimately satisfy us (Ps. 16:2; 43:3; 1 Pet. 3:18).

- ▶ True or false: The greatest love would pursue the greatest happiness.
- ▶ What would be the greatest happiness a human being could experience?

Read Psalm 16:2; 43:3.

- ▶ What is the best thing for a human being?

Read 1 Peter 3:18.

- ▶ According to this verse, why did Jesus die?
- ▶ Connecting these three passages together, what end did God have in mind by saving us? How was this act love on God's part?
- ▶ If we really love people, then what should we be pursuing for them? With what attitude?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ Who in your life do you love "naturally"? How can you ask God to help you be happy in loving others you don't "naturally" feel affection for? What specific loving actions might you do this week?

This midweek study will explore what it means for Scripture to be inspired by God. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Inspiration of Scripture

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's direction of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God spoke directly to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3-4,21; 1 John 4:6

1 God used human authors and written words to relay His divine revelation (2 Tim. 3:16).

While most religions try to lift man up to God, Christianity tells of a God who humbled Himself and descended to man. Aside from the incarnation, the clearest way God chose to reveal Himself to us is through the written words of Scripture. Of the many ways He could have expressed Himself (videos, dreams, shapes of clouds), God used human authors filled with His Spirit relaying God's words (2 Tim. 3:16). No dream, no "sign," no circumstance, no feeling in our hearts, or any other "revelation" is more definitive than the inspired words of Scripture.

2 God worked in and through the natural personality and vocabulary of these writers to say exactly what He wanted said exactly how He wanted it said (1 John 4:6; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 1:21).

When God inspired the scriptural writers, there were no trances or bodily take-overs. God used the natural vocabulary, personality, and style of the authors to convey exactly what God wanted said. Peter affirmed that the Spirit "carried along" (2 Pet. 1:21) scriptural writers, but not in a way where the writers weren't cognitively aware that they wrote for God (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 John 4:6). Paul used different vocabulary and style from John or David, but God used each for His specific purpose.

3 God so guided the writers that the original writings are perfect, without error, authoritative, and precisely what we need for all holiness (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

Many of the Scriptures are addressed to specific people or situations, like Isaiah's words to Israel or Paul's letter to Philemon. Nevertheless, those writings are authoritative for all time when understood properly; they are everything we need for holiness (2 Pet. 1:3-4). As such, they are perfect and without error in their original autographs (the original manuscripts).

Opening Activity

Place students into teams with three to four people. One person should be the "big shot." He or she will give ideas for a particular speech. The other two or three people will be scribes: They'll transcribe the official speech. However, the scribes are free to use their own ideas, experience, analogies, etc., in doing so.

For the first speech, the big shot should give ideas for a pep talk to give to a team who is down at half-time. After a few minutes of delivering/writing this speech, the big shot trades places with one of the scribes.

The next speech: A love-speech written to a crush. Give a few minutes to dictate, then the big shot switches with another scribe.

The third speech: advertising a new product. The fourth speech, if needed: an elegy for a soldier.

Compare the speeches of the scribes. How are they similar? How are they different? If the big-shots could, how would they have communicated so the scribe recorded the message correctly? Compare and contrast this exercise to the doctrine of inspiration.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Keep the Light On" by Christy Nockels
(*Be Held: Lullabies for the Beloved*, Keeper's Branch Records, 2017)
- ▶ "Word of God" by Vertical Worship
(*Live Worship from Vertical Church*, Provident Label Group, 2012)
- ▶ "Let It Echo (Heaven Fall)" by Jesus Culture
(*Let It Echo [Live]*, Sparrow Records, 2016)
- ▶ "The Secret Place" by Phil Wickham
(*Children of God*, Fair Trade Services, 2016)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "The Skinny on the Bible" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "The Bible" *Skitguys.com*

This midweek study will explore what it means for Scripture to be inspired by God. 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: Inspiration of Scripture

The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's direction of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God spoke directly to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

1 God used human authors and written words to relay His divine revelation (2 Tim. 3:16).

- ▶ *If you could use any means of communication you wanted, what would you choose? Why?*
- ▶ *When have you thought God was speaking to you? How did you know? How did you respond?*

Read 2 Timothy 3:16.

- ▶ *According to this text, how has God spoken to us? What are the Scriptures good for?*
- ▶ *In other words, is there anything the Scriptures aren't good for?*
- ▶ *What other ways could God have chosen to reveal Himself to us definitively?*
- ▶ *How do other ways God might communicate with us (circumstances, signs, counsel) compare to the Bible itself?*
- ▶ *If God has spoken definitively through the words of human authors in the Bible, what are some implications for us, especially in Bible study?*

2 God worked in and through the natural personality and vocabulary of these writers to say exactly what He wanted said exactly how He wanted it said (1 John 4:6; 1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Pet. 1:21).

Option: Find a performance of a beautiful piece of music. As students listen, instruct them to compose a short poem. Then invite them to share their poems (if they're willing) with one another.

- ▶ *You all heard the same piece. Did you write the same words?*
- ▶ *How does each poem specifically reflect the author, even though we each heard the same song?*
- ▶ *What is inspiration?*
- ▶ *When people are inspired, how does what they produce reflect their individual personalities?*
- ▶ *Inspiration literally means to put a spirit in. What is similar between the inspiration of this music and the inspiration of the authors of Scripture? What is different?*

Read 2 Peter 1:21 and 1 Corinthians 14:37.

- ▶ *In what sense were the writers "carried along"? Did they still retain their individual personality, vocabulary, and mannerisms in their writing, like you did in your poems?*

Reread 1 Corinthians 14:37. Then, read 1 John 4:6.

- ▶ *Were Scripture's writers aware they were writing the very words of God?*

3 God so guided the writers that the original writings are perfect, without error, authoritative, and precisely what we need for all holiness (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

- ▶ *Imagine your job is to create a "care package chest" that will be air-dropped to a survivor on a deserted island. Right now, the authorities can't attempt a rescue, but they can drop the care package. The package needs to have supplies to keep the person alive for a month. What would you put in it?*
- ▶ *Imagine that your care package gets switched with another and gets air-dropped to a soldier stuck behind enemy lines. Would it still be helpful? What would you have changed in the contents? What would have stayed the same?*
- ▶ *To whom was the Book of Isaiah originally written? Who was Paul's audience in Ephesians? To whom did Moses write Exodus?*
- ▶ *Since these books were written to the specific people in specific situations, are they still relevant today? How are they like the care package chest?*

Read 2 Peter 1:3-4.

- ▶ *According to Peter, how much did the Scriptures give us?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How has your view of the Bible changed since the start of this lesson? Share with the group one specific resolution you will make today (e.g., dedicated Bible study, memorization, sharing verses via social media, etc.).*

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

Essential Doctrine: Resurrection

The Old and New Testaments both teach that believers will one day experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Rom. 8:22-23; Phil. 3:20-21). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Scripture: *Matthew 10:28; John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:42-55; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 1:4-5; 3:2-4; 1 John 3:2-3; Revelation 20:4-5, 2-13; 21:4*

1 All human beings will one day be bodily resurrected from the dead (Matt. 10:28; John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:4-5,12-13).

Though we often think of eternity as a place where we will be disembodied spirits, the biblical picture is that human beings will have bodies for eternity. Though we are temporarily separated from our bodies when we die in this present age (2 Cor. 5:4; Jas. 2:26), at Jesus' return all human beings will be bodily resurrected (John 5:28-29). Both unbelievers and believers will be resurrected (even bodies that have decomposed God will put back together).

2 Christians' bodily resurrection will mean putting on an immortality similar to Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42-55; Phil. 3:21; Rev. 21:4).

One of the most glorious New Testament promises is that Christians' bodily resurrections will not simply give back our old bodies; rather, our old bodies will be transformed into a glory and immortality like Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:42-55, Paul drew an extended comparison between how in this life our bodies are like Adam's (the man of dust), but after the resurrection our bodies will be like Jesus' (the man of heaven). Our bodies will be perfect, with no pain or ailments (Rev. 21:4), and perhaps capable of supernatural feats like Jesus' body was post-resurrection.

3 The hope of our bodily resurrection drives us to greater holiness (Col. 1:4-5; 3:2-4; 1 John 3:2-3).

We can't even imagine what our glorified bodies will be like, because we'll need to experience them first (1 John 3:2-3). John carefully pointed out that Christians' resurrected bodies will be like Jesus', and this hope should drive us to purify ourselves. Paul said our faith and love spring from the hope reserved for us in heaven (Col. 1:4-5), a point he revisited in Colossians 3:2-4.

Opening Activity

Ask students to draw short comic strips (maybe 3-5 panels) of what a day in eternity might look like for Christians after Jesus returns. Allow them to share their comic strips with one another. Why did they depict Christians doing what they did?

Next, ask students to draw short comic strips showing what Jesus' resurrection body was like. What kind of things could He do with it?

Ask the students if there is overlap between the two comic strips. Should there be? If Jesus' resurrection body is a firstfruit of ours (i.e., ours will be like His), what kind of things should we expect to be able to do when Jesus comes back?

If you wish to pursue this question, you might ask students how most Christians perceive life after Jesus' return and where they got these ideas. Would they rather experience eternity as a spirit with no body or as a spirit in a body?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Beneath the Waters (I Will Rise) [Live]" by Hillsong Live (*Cornerstone [Live]*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2012)
- ▶ "I Will Rise" by Chris Tomlin (*How Great Is Our God: The Essentials Collection*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2011)
- ▶ "As It Is In Heaven" by Alisa Turner (*Alisa Turner-EP*, Integrity, 2017)
- ▶ "My Revival" by Lauren Daigle (*How Can It Be*, Centricity, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Amena Brown: Resurrection" *BluefishTV.com*

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of the resurrection. 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.

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The Old and New Testaments both teach that believers will one day experience a resurrection of the body from the dead (Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:12-14; John 11). The promise of the resurrection is found in the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it will take place at the future return of Christ. Because Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection, Christians can be assured that their resurrection will be similar in nature, meaning it will be both bodily and glorious (Rom. 8:22-23; Phil. 3:20-21). The hope of the future resurrection gives Christians confidence that death has been defeated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

1 All human beings will one day be bodily resurrected from the dead (Matt. 10:28; John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:4-5,12-13).

- ▶ *What kinds of things will happen when Jesus returns?*
- ▶ *For deceased Christians, what will be different about their lives before Jesus' return and after?*
- ▶ *For deceased unbelievers, what will be different about their lives before Jesus' return and after?*

Read John 5:28-29.

- ▶ *What will happen when Jesus calls for the dead?*
- ▶ *What two groups will emerge? What will they emerge from? Can mere spirits emerge from graves? So what will they have?*

Read Revelation 20:4-5.

- ▶ *What happens to Christians in this passage?*

Read Revelation 20:12-13.

- ▶ *What happens to everyone else in this passage?*

Read Matthew 10:28.

- ▶ *According to Jesus, why should we fear (i.e., respect) God? What will be punished in hell? Why doesn't He just specify "spirit"?*
- ▶ *Does the teaching of bodily resurrection make heaven and hell more or less powerful than if they were merely residences of spirits?*

2 Christians' bodily resurrection will mean putting on an immortality similar to Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor. 15:42-55; Phil. 3:21; Rev. 21:4).

- ▶ *Would you rather be simply a spirit, or would you rather have a body?*
- ▶ *What pleasures can a body experience that a mere spirit can't? What service can a body render that a mere spirit can't?*

Read Philippians 3:21.

- ▶ *What will Jesus do to our bodies? What could Jesus do with His body? Is the idea of a resurrection body like Jesus' enticing?*

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-55.

- ▶ *What is Paul's biggest idea in this passage?*
- ▶ *In what ways will our resurrection bodies be superior to our earthly bodies?*

Read Revelation 21:4.

- ▶ *What does this passage teach us about our resurrection bodies, especially with reference to pain?*

3 The hope of our bodily resurrection drives us to greater holiness (Col. 1:4-5; 3:2-4; 1 John 3:2-3).

Read 1 John 3:2-3.

- ▶ *What does John tell us here about our resurrection bodies? How should these verses make us excited?*
- ▶ *How do people with this hope respond (v. 3)? Why do you think such hope spurs purification?*

Read Colossians 1:4-5.

- ▶ *According to Paul, what is the motivation for the Colossians' faith and love? How does this idea overlap with 1 John 3:2-3?*
- ▶ *When you are really looking forward to something (like a concert or a football game), how does your behavior and attitude change in the week prior?*

Read Colossians 3:2-4.

- ▶ *How can we set our minds on the hope of the resurrection the way we set our minds on the hope of a concert or other exciting event? How should we act, think, and feel differently?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *When 18th century pastor Jonathan Edwards thought about the resurrection, he resolved "to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of." How can you pursue this resolution this week?*

This midweek study will explore our adoption in Christ. Use the following outline, activity, and playlist to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Adoption

Adoption into God's family is one the positive benefits of justification. We are pardoned from the judgment against us through justification and experience a change of identity—we become children of God (John 1:12; Gal. 4:5). Adoption restores our relationship with God, which was once lost through the fall. Adoption also gives believers the benefits of being heirs of God and coheirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17).

Scripture: *Psalm 27:4; Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:1,4-7; Ephesians 1:5,17; 1 John 3:3*

1 Adoption means perfect peace with God our Father regardless of our works (Rom. 8:15).

We often wrongly think our relationship with God is works-based. For example, if we sin, we think we are unworthy to approach Him. But adoption means sonship, and sonship means total acceptance at all times, regardless of our status (Rom.8:15). The cry of Abba is an intimate, personal, caring cry, given precisely in times of trouble and insufficiency. We don't need to be good enough for God any more—we're His adopted children!

2 Adoption means a guaranteed inheritance (Rom. 8:16, Gal. 4:1,4-7; 1 John 3:3).

It's no coincidence that Paul moved immediately from our intimate peace with our Abba Father into our inheritance as adopted sons (Rom. 8:16). He made the same move in Galatians 4:4-7. The realization that our adoption includes inheritance has at least a two-fold effect. On the one hand, we realize that our present state may not always be pleasant (Gal. 4:1); an inheritance is, by definition, future. But on the other hand, that future state is certain, and so we should look forward to, prepare for, and live for that inheritance (1 John 3:3).

3 Adoption means an ever-deepening relationship with our Father (Ps. 27:4; Eph. 1:5,17).

To be adopted means to enter into a new familial relationship. The greatest joy in that relationship is the relationship; the ever-deepening bond between parent and child. Paul pointed out our adoption to God through Jesus in Ephesians 1:5, so it's no coincidence that his first prayer was then for us to grow in the knowledge of God Himself (v. 17). This knowledge is not just intellectual knowledge; it's the intimate, deep communion between the Father and His child. It's the one thing the psalmist wanted above all else (Ps. 27:4), and it will be our ever-new satisfaction for all time.

Opening Activity

Choose three volunteers from your group. One at a time, they will each play the Picture Game. Teams will draw on a whiteboard or large piece of paper pictures that represent adoption to try to get the rest of the group to answer correctly. Allow each person one minute, and don't erase or remove their pictures when they're done (if the group guesses adoption during the first person's drawings, then the second and third won't play).

- ▶ Talk about how each picture shows the idea of adoption. What is adoption? What is included with it?
- ▶ Ask the group what they would have drawn if they were the volunteer artist.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Children of God" by Phil Wickham (*Children of God*, Fair Trade Services, 2016)
- ▶ "Kings & Queens" by Audio Adrenaline (*Kings & Queens*, Fair Trade Services, 2013)
- ▶ "Father" by Hillsong UNITED (*Aftermath*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2013)
- ▶ "Good Good Father" by Chris Tomlin (*Never Lose Sight*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2016)

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1 Adoption means perfect peace with God our Father regardless of our works (Rom. 8:15).

- ▶ Do you have any relationships in your life in which you know you will be loved and accepted no matter what? What are they like? What are they based on?
- ▶ What are most human relationships based on?
- ▶ What is the basis for our relationship with God?

Read Romans 8:15.

- ▶ Why would a slave have reason to fear? Why would we have reason to fear God if we saw ourselves as His slaves?
- ▶ What does the word Abba mean? What is the significance of this name if we use it to address God?
- ▶ If we are adopted sons of Abba Father, then do our sins or shortcomings lessen our status before God? Do our shortcomings make us any less the children of our parents?
- ▶ If we are adopted sons of Abba Father, then does our success increase our status before God? Does our success make us any more the children of our parents?
- ▶ What joy and freedom is there in being adopted children no matter what? How does this help us when we sin? How does it keep us humble?

2 Adoption means a guaranteed inheritance (Rom. 8:16, Gal. 4:1,4-7; 1 John 3:3).

Option: Recall (or watch) the clip of The Lion King where Mufasa tells Simba that all that the light touches will one day be his. How would you react if you were Simba? Would you spend your childhood planning how to use your kingdom to please yourself? Would you study to be a good king?

Read Romans 8:16.

- ▶ Once Paul has established that we have God as Abba regardless of our actions, where did his thought proceed next? Why do you think he moved in that direction?

Read Galatians 4:4-7.

- ▶ What parallels do you see in this passage with Romans 8?

Read Galatians 4:1.

- ▶ According to the text, what might the heirs' life be like in childhood? What might we expect our lives to be like right now, before Jesus' return?

Read 1 John 3:3.

- ▶ How should we be spending our time now in preparation to receive our inheritance? What specific things are you doing in your life to prepare to receive your inheritance? What specific things can you start doing this week?

3 Adoption means an ever-deepening relationship with our Father (Ps. 27:4; Eph. 1:5,17).

- ▶ Imagine your family is going to adopt a child in a foreign country. You visit your new sibling, who has lived in the orphanage his or her entire life. He or she is terrified at leaving the orphanage. What would you tell him or her the best thing about being adopted is?
- ▶ What do you think the best thing about being adopted by God is?

Read Ephesians 1:5,17.

- ▶ After Paul noted the Ephesians' adoption, what was the first thing he prayed for?
- ▶ What (or who) is the best thing in the world for us?
- ▶ If we relate to God—the best thing in the world—as Father, what degree of intimacy and joy should we expect from Him?

Read Psalm 27:4.

- ▶ What was the one request the psalmist had?
- ▶ How do you think the psalmist would respond if he had considered God as Father? How should we respond?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ What one thing did you learn about adoption?
- ▶ What are two changes you can make to your lifestyle this week?
- ▶ Who are three people whom you could encourage with the idea of adoption as children of God?

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of our union with Christ. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video idea to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Union with Christ

Believers' union with Christ is at the heart of salvation. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we dwell in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is permanent; it will last for all eternity.

Scripture: Romans 8:5-10; 2 Corinthians 1:20; 5:21; Galatians 3:16,29

1 Our union with Christ is the centerpiece of both our status and our identity in the eyes of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:16,29).

If you think about it, our union with Jesus is the absolute foundation for all our hope for all eternity. Our standing before God rests entirely and solely on Jesus' work accomplished on our behalf. Because of Him, we are righteous and sinless in God's eyes (2 Cor. 5:21). Our union with Jesus, the promised seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16), also makes us Abraham's descendants and heirs of Abraham's promise (Gal. 3:29).

2 The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to unite us to Christ (Rom. 8:5-10).

The Holy Spirit is the specific person of the Trinity who unites us to Christ. Notice Paul's description of the Spirit-led life in this passage. After Paul described how the Spirit works through our minds to delight in and follow God's law, he equated the Spirit as both "of God" and "of Christ" (v. 9). Then, he equated having the Spirit of Christ (v. 9) with Christ being "in you" (v. 10). Specifically, the Spirit unites us to Christ, and this is evidenced by a new Christ-centered mindset.

3 Our union with Christ guarantees God's favor and promises to us (2 Cor. 1:20).

Being united to Christ makes us descendants of Abraham and heirs of promise (Gal. 3:29). Paul's claim in this passage was even more expansive: Not only are the promises of Abraham given to us in Jesus, but every promise in the Bible is applied to us in Jesus (2 Cor. 1:20) Think about it: When the Father looks at Jesus, He is very pleased, and wishes to give Him every honor. And when the Father looks at us, He sees Jesus—our union with Jesus is what merits us the good favor of our loving heavenly Father!

Opening Activity

If you have access to the internet, show students the clip from Napoleon Dynamite of Pedro offering protection to a bullied kid. If you don't have access, you can ask students if they've ever heard of a similar scenario: One student would get bullied or taken advantage of, but because of some association with another student, the first student was essentially protected or admired. Use this parallel to set up the idea of our union with Christ.

- ▶ How is the bullied kid in video different in the hallway versus at the bike rack?

In one sense, he's no different; he's the same kid (even with the same clothes!). On the other hand, he's a different kid because he's now under Pedro's protection.

- ▶ How are we the same-but-different once we're in union with Jesus?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Salvation" by Skillet
(*Rise*, Atlantic Recording, 2013)
- ▶ "I Have This Hope" by Tenth Avenue North
(*Followers*, Provident Label Group, 2016)
- ▶ "Healer of Souls" by Switchfoot
(*Where the Light Shines Through*, Vanguard Records, 2016)
- ▶ "Everything Is Mine In You" by Christy Nockels
(*Let It Be Jesus [Live]*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Resume Vs Referral" *Skitguys.com*

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of our union with Christ. 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: Union with Christ

Believers' union with Christ is at the heart of salvation. The Bible describes salvation as entering into a covenant relationship with God and describes the church (which is made up of believers) as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23-32). Christians believe Christ dwells in our hearts through faith (Christ in us) and that we dwell in Him (Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:1-4). This union is permanent; it will last for all eternity.

1 Our union with Christ is the centerpiece of both our status and our identity in the eyes of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:16,29).

- ▶ Who are some people or groups you are associated with?
- ▶ Which of these associations do you like? Which do you not like? Why?
- ▶ If you could be associated with anyone in the world, with whom would you want to be associated?
- ▶ How do you think God feels when He looks at you? Is He happy? Delighted? Disappointed? Why?
- ▶ How do you think God feels when He looks upon Jesus? Is He happy? Delighted? Disappointed? Why?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

- ▶ According to this famous verse, what does God see when He looks at a Christian? How does that mean God feels when he looks at you, a Christian?
- ▶ When God looks at you, He sees you dressed in Christ's righteousness. How does that make you feel?

Read Galatians 3:16.

- ▶ Who is the true descendant of Abraham?

Read Galatians 3:29.

- ▶ How does this text expand our understanding of who the true descendant of Abraham is? So how do we become descendants of Abraham?
- ▶ How is being united with Christ better than any other association we could think of?

2 The Holy Spirit applies the work of Christ to unite us to Christ (Rom. 8:5-10).

- ▶ In terms of our union with Christ, what do you think the Spirit's role in our union with Christ is?

Read Romans 8:5-10.

- ▶ What's the difference between a mind set on the flesh (non-believers) and a mind set on the Spirit (Christians)?
- ▶ What's so bad about the mind set on the flesh (vv. 6-8)?
- ▶ In contrast, what would be good about the mind set on the Spirit?

- ▶ How do we know we are in the Spirit (v. 9)? What two names did Paul give to the Spirit here?
- ▶ What is the opening phrase? What does this phrase connect with in verse 9?
- ▶ How is Christ in us? By what person of the Trinity?
- ▶ In our union with Christ, what is the Spirit's work?
- ▶ Reread verses 5-8. What is a telltale sign that the Spirit is in us, bringing us in union with Christ?

3 Our union with Christ guarantees God's favor and promises to us (2 Cor. 1:20).

- ▶ If we were on our own before God, how should we expect to be treated?
- ▶ What are some of the sweetest promises in the Bible for you?
- ▶ How do we know these promises apply to us? How do we know they will still apply to us in a thousand millennia?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:20.

- ▶ How does this verse show us the glory of our union with Christ?
- ▶ How should such a sweeping promise affect our emotions?
- ▶ How should such a sweeping promise motivate us to greater holiness? Should such security make us lax in our spiritual walk or inspire us to greater holiness and joy? (Hint: think of the mind set on the Spirit back in Rom. 8:5-10.)

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ How would you use our union with Christ to comfort or exhort the following people?
 - ▶ A professional athlete
 - ▶ A tired single mom
 - ▶ A lonely middle schooler
 - ▶ A drug addict
 - ▶ Anyone else you can think of? Maybe someone in your life?

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

Essential Doctrine: Sanctification

After we are justified by faith—declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ—we undergo a lifetime of sanctification, meaning we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole person, transforming the heart, mind, and character to reflect Jesus.

Scripture: *Leviticus 19:19; Isaiah 52:11; John 15:11; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 6:17; Galatians 2:11-14; 5:17; Revelation 18:4*

1 Sanctification literally means to be set apart

(2 Cor. 6:17; Isa. 52:11; Lev. 19:19; Rev. 18:4).

In its original sense, to *sanctify* something simply means *to set it apart*. Believers have been set apart from the world to be reserved for God (Isa. 52:11; 2 Cor. 6:17). This setting-apart was first applied to the nation of Israel, Abraham's descendants, which explains the amount of ceremonial laws that served as a picture of Israel's distinction from the world (Lev. 19:19). Sanctification now means drawing away from the world so we might draw near to God (Rev. 18:4).

2 Sanctification is not a linear growth (Gal. 2:11-14; 5:17).

Sanctification is our progressive, growing holiness in the Lord.

However, we should remember that growth is not always linear. Yes, the overall trend should be toward greater holiness, but there may be some serious regressions. The Spirit is constantly at war with our flesh (Gal. 5:17), and there will sometimes be casualties; sins, temptations, and difficulties may drag us back or hinder us for a time. Even Peter himself fell into significant sin requiring public rebuke (Gal. 2:11-14). But he continued in the grace of God, and we should as well.

3 Sanctification means becoming more like Christ, especially in our capacity for greater joy (John 15:11; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Sanctification means becoming more like Jesus. While this idea might initially sound boring, we should realize it actually means increased joy. Sanctification is growing in experiencing joy like Jesus does (John 15:11), and that's a lot of joy. There are many joys we cannot taste unless we drink them from the cup of growth and discipline. For example, consider the joy of a professional athlete in the home run derby. The single best discipline to become like Jesus in all ways, including joy, is seeing Him in His Word and allowing that to transform us (2 Cor. 3:18).

Opening Activity

Place students into pairs. Each pair should create three or four samples of "which one of these is not like the rest." For example, they might choose four peoples' shoes, three of which are blue and one of which is not. Or, they may list four people, three of whom are women and one of whom is a man. They can use any props or items available to them in the room. If you have internet access, students can use the web. Or they can simply list ideas on paper.

Each pair should share their examples with the rest of the group. Then, the group should try to figure out which item is not like the rest. Talk about what sets the different item apart in each list.

- ▶ If we played "which one of these is not like the rest" where the different "item" were a Christian, how would the Christian be distinct from nonbelievers?

Use this discussion to lead into the first point: That *sanctification* means *being set apart from the world*.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Unfinished" by Mandisa
(*Out of the Dark [Deluxe Edition]*, Sparrow Records, 2017)
- ▶ "Once And for All" by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ "Anomaly" by Lecrae
(*Anomaly*, Reach Records, 2014)
- ▶ "Never Be the Same" by Danny Gokey
(*Rise*, BMG Rights Management, 2017)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Famous Failures" *BluefishTV.com*
- ▶ "Disciples: Sanctification" *Skitguys.com*

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of sanctification. 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: Sanctification

After we are justified by faith—declared to be in right standing with God through the righteousness of Christ—we undergo a lifetime of sanctification, meaning we are continually made more like Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26; 2 Thess. 2:13). Scripture speaks of sanctification as a present position (we have already been sanctified) and as a continuing process. Sanctification affects the whole person, transforming the heart, mind, and character to reflect Jesus.

1 Sanctification literally means to be set apart

(2 Cor. 6:17; Isa. 52:11; Lev. 19:19; Rev. 18:4).

- ▶ What do you think when you hear the term sanctification?
- ▶ The original sense of sanctification might also be translated consecration (Josh. 3:5). What does it mean to consecrate something?

Read Isaiah 52:11 and 2 Corinthians 6:17.

- ▶ What does God want His people to do here? Why do you think Paul chose to cite the verse from Isaiah? Do you see any significance to Paul using a command originally for the people of Israel with reference to the Corinthians?

Read Leviticus 19:19.

- ▶ These commands might seem a bit odd. What purpose might God have behind giving them to Israel? How do they symbolize the way Israel is to be separate (you might say consecrated or sanctified) from the other nations?

Read Revelation 18:4.

- ▶ How should we be set apart in our leisure? Work? Schools? Family relations? Romantic relations? Attitudes?

2 Sanctification is not a linear growth (Gal. 2:11-14; 5:17).

- ▶ Have you ever trained for a big event? Like a marathon, or a big hiking trip, or a big test? How did you do it? Was your progression smooth?
- ▶ Think about your growth in the Christian life. If we charted it, what would it look like? Has it been smooth? Easy? Gradual?

Read Galatians 2:11-14.

- ▶ Who was the main person doing wrong in these verses? What, particularly, was he doing wrong?
- ▶ Are you surprised that Peter messed up? Why or why not?
- ▶ At the time, what would Peter's position have been within the church? If he backslid in his sanctification, what is the implication for us?
- ▶ Should we be content with backsliding?

Read Galatians 5:17.

- ▶ How did Paul describe the Christian life here? In a war, are there temporary defeats as well as victories? What do we do after these defeats?

3 Sanctification means becoming more like Christ, especially in our capacity for greater joy (John 15:11; Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).

- ▶ Imagine someone asking you, "Why would I want to be sanctified if I'm already going to heaven?" What would you say?

Read Romans 8:29.

- ▶ What is the ultimate purpose of our Christian growth?
- ▶ Is being like Jesus an appealing idea or a boring one? Why?
- ▶ Have you ever had to work really hard for something that brought you joy? For example, have you ever accomplished a goal and felt terrific about it? Or do you enjoy sports more because you're trained in it or music more because you yourself are a musician?
- ▶ How do these worked-for joys compare to "easy" joys like a quick snack?

Read John 15:11.

- ▶ What is Jesus' goal for us in our sanctification?
- ▶ How is the joy of sanctification like the worked-for joys we discussed a moment ago? Is sanctification ultimately boring or exciting?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

- ▶ How do we best become like Jesus? What implications does this verse hold for our lifestyle now?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ How has this lesson inspired you to pursue holiness?

This midweek study will explore what the Bible teaches on angels and demons. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video idea to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Angels and Demons

Other than humans and animals, the Bible mentions other beings God created—angels (who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God”), “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word angel carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. However, angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and continually work evil in the world today (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work. The Bible even describes Satan, the head of demons, as one who seeks to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). Though demons have power, they are limited by God’s control and can only act within the constraints of what God allows. In the end, all demons will be cast into the lake of fire, which was originally created for this purpose.

Scripture: *Matthew 8:28-29; Luke 4:5-6; 11:20-26; 1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4; Hebrews 1:7, 13-14; Revelation 22:8*

1 Angels are ministering spirits who magnify God and serve Christians (1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 1:7,13-14).

The Bible describes another race of spirits with independent wills and personalities called angels. We’re not told when or how God created them, but they show up frequently as His servants (Heb. 1:7). Angels worship God and accomplish His purposes (Josh. 6:13; Ps.34:7; Isa. 6:2). Amazingly, they serve Christians (Heb. 1:13-14), and we will in some capacity rule over them, because we are human like Jesus (1 Cor. 6:3).

2 Angels and demons wield considerable power, especially demons in this present evil age (Luke 4:5-6; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Rev. 22:8).

Angels are mighty and powerful, so we are tempted to worship them when we see them (Rev. 22:8). The fallen angels who have rebelled against God—the demons—are also powerful and mighty, especially in “this present evil age” (Gal. 1:4). Paul went so far as to call Satan the god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4). Indeed, Satan is currently able to delegate worldly political power (Luke 4:5-6), though not beyond God’s sovereign will and permission. We should not underestimate them.

3 Believers don’t need to fear demons, because they are subject to Jesus’ power (Matt. 8:28-29; Luke 11:20-26).

On the other hand, if we are Christians, we don’t need to fear demons. Their power is limited by the sovereign hand of our loving Father. Demons yield in meek powerlessness before Jesus (Matt. 8:29). Jesus compared Satan to a strong man, but also compared Himself to the one who binds the strong man and plunders his house (Luke 11:20-23). However, Jesus also warned that anyone who tries to run his or her life without Jesus is open to terrible demonic attack (Luke 11:24-26).

Opening Activity

Place students into two groups. Give each group paper and drawing utensils. Both groups have the same task: They will create entries for an illustrated Bible Dictionary for the entry *Angel*. However, the two groups will use two different sources. One group should only use the Bible as their source material. The other group can use anything except the Bible for their source material (e.g., Christian ideas, popular culture, books, the internet, movies, etc.). They should create entries that show what angels look like and what they do.

Note: If you have enough students, you can do this same exercise with demons. Place students in four equal groups, with two groups researching angels and two groups researching demons, each with different source material.

- ▶ Compare what each group came up with. Any overlap? What is different?
- ▶ What is the one reliable source we have about supernatural beings?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)” by Chris Tomlin (*Burning Lights*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2013)
- ▶ “I See Heaven” by Bryan & Katie Torwalt (*Here On Earth*, Sparrow Records, 2011)
- ▶ “Resurrection Blood” by Cody Carnes (*The Darker the Night/The Brighter the Morning*, Sparrow Records, 2017)
- ▶ “Symphony” by Passion (*Passion: Here for You*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2011)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ “Demons” *Skitguys.com*

This midweek study will explore what the Bible teaches on angels and demons. 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: Angels and Demons

Besides the creation of humanity and animals, the Bible also speaks of other beings that God created—angels, who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God,” “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word angel carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. Angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

Demons are angelic beings who sinned against God and now continually work evil in the world today (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1; Luke 10:18). Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work, as seen in the Bible’s description of Satan, the head of demons, who seeks to “steal, kill, and destroy.” Though demons have power, they are limited by God’s control and can only act within the constraints of what God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.

1 Angels are ministering spirits who magnify God and serve Christians (1 Cor. 6:3; Heb. 1:7,13-14).

- ▶ *What do you think angels are? What do you think an angel’s job description looks like?*
- ▶ *Why do you think pop culture, both Christian and secular, is fascinated by supernatural beings? How is this interest helpful? How is it harmful?*

Read Hebrews 1:7.

- ▶ *What is an angel’s role?*

Read Hebrews 1:13-14.

- ▶ *What is amazing about this passage? Who do we typically think is higher in the spiritual order, angels or people? According to this passage, which is it? Why do you think this order is? (Hint: What is Jesus’ nature?)*

Read 1 Corinthians 6:3.

- ▶ *What stands out about this verse? Why do human beings receive such a gracious, elevated position? Again, think: what is Jesus?*

2 Angels and demons wield considerable power, especially demons in this present evil age

(Luke 4:5-6; 2 Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Rev. 22:8).

- ▶ *What would you do if you met an angel?*

Read Revelation 22:8.

- ▶ *What did John do when he met an angel? Why do you think he did this? What conclusions can we draw about angels from this verse?*
- ▶ *If angels are powerful, are demons also powerful?*

Read Galatians 1:4.

- ▶ *What did Paul call the world’s current status? Why do you think he described it this way?*

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4.

- ▶ *What did Paul call Satan in this verse? Why? What does it communicate about his power in this present evil age?*

Read Luke 4:5-6.

- ▶ *What kind of power does Satan wield here? How much?*
- ▶ *How do you think Christians should react to this revelation of Satan’s power?*

3 Believers don’t need to fear demons, because they are subject to Jesus’ power (Matt. 8:28-29; Luke 11:20-26).

- ▶ *In a fight, who would win: Vin Diesel or Chuck Norris? (You can substitute other tough guys if you like.)*
- ▶ *In a fight, who would win: Jesus or demons? How close would the match be?*

Read Matthew 8:28-29.

- ▶ *How tough did the demons make these guys (v. 28)?*
- ▶ *What was their attitude toward Jesus (v. 29)? Who is clearly the more powerful?*
- ▶ *Should followers of Jesus fear demons?*

Read Luke 11:20-26.

- ▶ *Who is the strong man (vv. 20-23)? Who is the One who plunders him? What does the Plunderer take?*
- ▶ *What is the point of the story in verses 24-26? How can we make certain that when a demon comes knocking at our house, he finds it well-guarded?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *Ask each student to finish the following sentences:*
 - ▶ *Angels are cool because...*
 - ▶ *Demons are not cool because...*
 - ▶ *Jesus is way cooler than either angels or demons because...*

This midweek study will explore the moral influence theory of the atonement. Use the following outline, activity, and playlist to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Moral Influence Theory of Atonement

Other than humans and animals, the Bible mentions other beings God created—angels (who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God”), “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word angel carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. However, angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

Scripture: *Isaiah 53:4-7; Luke 23:34; Romans 5:6-11; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:21; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 2:21-23*

1 The cross, as the picture of Jesus’ excellence, compels us to imitate Him (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10).

The cross is the best display of God’s attributes: His justice, love, honor, wrath, mercy, sovereignty, and wisdom. It is so important that Paul resolved to know nothing but Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Since seeing Jesus rightly causes us to become like Him (2 Cor. 3:18), part of that transformation happens when our own morals and lifestyle conform to Jesus’ own morals (Phil. 3:10).

2 Though the cross does influence us morally, this influence is not the atonement itself (Isa. 53:4-7; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Those who are given eyes to see, look at the cross and see the greatest demonstration of love in the history of the universe. However, seeing is not the atonement itself. Our problem is not just the wicked orientation of our hearts; it’s also the injustice and dishonor we’ve done to God’s name. Isaiah clearly pointed out that the Messiah was a substitute for us, taking on the punishment for our sins (Isa. 53:4-6); however, Isaiah also pointed out the moral example Jesus gives to us (v. 7). In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul also clearly pointed to Jesus’ atonement being more than influential in nature—it was completely substitutionary.

3 The cross should compel complete thanksgiving and praise toward God and love and compassion toward human beings, especially our enemies (Luke 23:34; Rom. 5:6-11; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).

The moral influence of the cross extends two ways: vertically and horizontally. Vertically, the cross’s beauty sets our hearts on fire for God in light of His love toward rebellious sinners (Rom. 5:6-11). Horizontally, Jesus’ grace toward those who harm Him reminds us to show grace to those who offend, harm, or slander us (Luke 23:34; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Opening Activity

If possible, show your students the clip from *Les Misérables* where the bishop hosted Valjean (a released criminal) for the night, but Valjean beat the bishop and stole his silver. The police caught Valjean and returned him to the bishop. Surprisingly, the bishop insisted he gave Valjean the silver and so freed Valjean. However, the bishop instructed Valjean to use that grace to become a noble person. The remainder of the story involved Valjean trying to become such a moral person. If you can’t show the clip, describe the scene to them.

Use this parallel to introduce the idea of the moral influence theory of the atonement. Do students think it is realistic? What would make such a demonstration of grace effective?

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “This Is Amazing Grace” by Bethel Music & Jeremy Riddle (*Discover Bethel Music*, Bethel Music, 2013)
- ▶ “Revelation Song” by Kari Jobe (*Kari Jobe*, Gateway Music, 2010)
- ▶ “At the Cross (Love Ran Red)” by Chris Tomlin (*Love Ran Red*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2014)
- ▶ “Man of Sorrows” by Ellie Holcomb (*Red Sea Road*, Full Heart Music, 2017)

This midweek study will explore the moral influence theory of the atonement. 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: Moral Influence Theory of Atonement

Other than humans and animals, the Bible mentions other beings God created—angels (who are also referred to in Scripture as “sons of God”), “holy ones,” “spirits,” “principalities,” and “powers.” In the original languages of the Bible, the word angel carries the meaning of a messenger, which indicates one of their primary reasons for existence. However, angels carry out a number of other functions throughout Scripture: bringing God glory, carrying out God’s plans and purpose, and reminding humanity that the unseen world is real.

1 The cross, as the picture of Jesus’ excellence, compels us to imitate Him (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10).

- ▶ Imagine a warden comes to a death row inmate and says that inmate is to be released; in exchange, the warden will be executed in the inmate’s place. Do you think this is a good plan for reforming the prisoner? Why or why not?
- ▶ Imagine that the prisoner has to watch the warden die. Do you think the prisoner would be more likely to reform? Why or why not?
- ▶ How does the warden-prisoner story parallel Jesus and us? Does Jesus’ death compel us to reform morally? Why or why not?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:2.

- ▶ What one thing did Paul resolve to know among the Corinthians? Why do you think he focused on the crucifixion and not the miracles or the teaching?
- ▶ What does this passage tell us about the importance of the crucifixion?
- ▶ Which of God’s attributes can we see in the crucifixion?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

- ▶ How do we become like Jesus? What attributes of Jesus do we see in the crucifixion? How should we adopt them?

Read Philippians 3:10.

- ▶ What do you think Paul meant when he said he wanted to be conformed to Jesus’ death? What moral changes should Jesus’ death produce in us?

2 Though the cross does influence us morally, this influence is not the atonement itself (Isa. 53:4-7; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Read Isaiah 53:4-7.

- ▶ In this prophecy of Jesus’ death for us, how did Isaiah explain the atonement? What terms did Isaiah use to describe what happened when Jesus died?
- ▶ So is the moral influence theory of the atonement sufficient to explain our salvation in itself? What must we add?

- ▶ Nevertheless, there is a moral influence element in the atonement, even in Isaiah’s description. Where do you see this moral influence idea in verse 7?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

- ▶ How did Paul reinforce some of Isaiah’s ideas with this verse?

3 The cross should compel complete thanksgiving and praise toward God and love and compassion toward human beings, especially our enemies (Luke 23:34; Rom. 5:6-11; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).

- ▶ Who are some enemies you have in your life right now?
- ▶ Has one of your enemies, or someone you didn’t like, done something for you? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
- ▶ Who was the greatest enemy you ever had? (Hint: Think really big.) How did God show love to you, His enemy?

Read Romans 5:6-11.

- ▶ How should we respond to God’s great love shown in Jesus’ death? How can we make verse 11 real in our lives today?
- ▶ Think back to when your enemy (or anyone) showed you grace. How did you treat other people immediately after?

Read 1 Peter 2:21-23.

- ▶ According to Peter, how should we treat those who mistreat us? Why? What example did he give us to follow?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ John Harrigan said, “People need loving the most when they deserve it the least.” How does Jesus’ death exemplify this idea? Who deserves love the least in our lives? How can we imitate Jesus to them this week?

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to recognize that all humanity has inherited a sin nature that can only be overcome through the power of the Holy Spirit. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by receiving Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith because it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:1-12,13-21,22-28; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:13-16; 2 Peter 1:4

1 Faith rests on historical facts, primarily Jesus' death and resurrection, and God's previous promises (2 Chron. 20:1-12; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:13-16).

Christian faith is not blind; it has a foundation in history, most notably Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. When John testified about Jesus, he testified as an eyewitness to historical events (1 John 1:1-3). When Jehoshaphat was faced with an overwhelming enemy (2 Chron. 20:1-4), his prayer of faith looked back on God's previous work (vv. 5-11), waiting to see God work in his circumstances then (v. 12).

2 Faith acts in reliance on the promises of God (2 Chron. 20:13-21; Gal. 2:20; 2 Pet. 1:4).

If the temple of faith is built on the foundation of history, the crane that builds the temple is God's future promises. The trellis on which the plant of faith sends out its vines is made of God's promises (2 Pet. 1:4). Paul even said the life he lived then, he lived by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:20); he loved and spoke and acted while banking on God's promises being true. And when God promised victory through Jahaziel, Jehoshaphat acted in trust, sending out the army with the singers in front, praising God (2 Chron. 20:13-21).

3 Faith brings glory to God because it displays that He is the source of power, wisdom, and righteousness, not us (2 Chron. 20:22-28).

The temple of faith reflects God's brilliance to a watching world. The plant of faith, rooted in history and growing on promises, produces blossoms whose scent is the excellence of God. Faith, by its nature, looks away from self and exalts what it looks forward to. Faith makes certain God, not anyone else, receives glory since He provides the power, wisdom, and righteousness. Jehoshaphat responded to his victory with tremendous praise, because he knew God was the One who gave them the victory and deserved the glory (2 Chron. 20:22-28).

Opening Activity

Place students into small groups, with maybe three or four students each. Ask them to imagine the following scenario. They are part of a traveling missionary group. This group goes to people groups who have just heard the good news of Jesus for the first time. Students' specific part in the gospel presentation is to illustrate faith to the audience through a skit. The audience can be anyone from inner city adults to convicts in rehabilitation programs to deep-desert aborigines. Since the audience is not yet biblically literate, students should create a skit that illustrates faith from normal, everyday life.

Give them time to prep the skits, then allow each group to act them out. Debrief what they did well. Discuss where in the Bible we see what they showed. Correct any assumptions they made that may not have been biblical.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Trust in You" by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ "Live Like That" by Sidewalk Prophets
(*Live Like That*, Word Entertainment, 2012)
- ▶ "By Faith" by Keith and Kristyn Getty
(*Awaken the Dawn*, Getty Music Label, 2009)
- ▶ "Desert Song" by Hillsong UNITED
(*Across the Earth: Tear Down the Walls [Live]*, Hillsong Music Australia, 2010)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Disciples: Faith" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "Faith vs. Fear" *BluefishTV.com*

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to recognize that all humanity has inherited a sin nature that can only be overcome through the power 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: Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than being a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by receiving Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith because it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

1 Faith rests on historical facts, primarily Jesus' death and resurrection, and God's previous promises (2 Chron. 20:1-12; 1 John 1:1-3; 4:13-16).

- ▶ True faith is a blind leap in the dark. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- ▶ Who is someone or something you would consider faithful? What makes them faithful?
- ▶ What is that person or thing's track record? Is trusting someone with such a track record "blind" faith?

Read 1 John 4:13-16.

- ▶ What did John emphasize about his personal history, especially in verse 14?

Read 1 John 1:1-3.

- ▶ How does this passage make his role as historical eyewitness even more important?
- ▶ Is our trust of God blind trust? How is faith more like a look in the rear view mirror or looking through the old photo album?
- ▶ In God's great photo album, what one "picture" is the biggest demonstration of His trustworthiness?

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-12.

- ▶ What big problem did King Jehoshaphat have?
- ▶ Look at his prayer. What "history" filled his prayer? How did the history of God's work build Jehoshaphat's faith?

2 Faith acts in reliance on the promises of God (2 Chron. 20:13-21; Gal. 2:20; 2 Pet. 1:4).

- ▶ Imagine you are at Old Faithful. It is almost time for the geyser to go off, but it hasn't yet. Do you still think it will go off? Why or why not?
- ▶ Faith looks back at past performance, but it also looks forward to fulfillment. What are some non-spiritual ways you show faith everyday (e.g., showing up to the school cafeteria trusting that they will have food prepared for you)?

Read 2 Peter 1:4.

- ▶ What does God give us to place our faith in for the future?

Read Galatians 2:20.

- ▶ What kind of life did Paul live in this passage? What might a life of faith look like? How does it rest on God's promises?

Read 2 Chronicles 20:13-21.

- ▶ What changed since the first part of Jehoshaphat's story? Was the enemy army still out there?
- ▶ What did God give through Jahaziel?
- ▶ How did God's promise change the attitude and actions of Jehoshaphat and Judah? How should God's promises affect our attitudes and actions?

3 Faith brings glory to God because it displays that He is the source of power, wisdom, and righteousness, not us (2 Chron. 20:22-28).

- ▶ Salvation by faith is unique to Christianity. In many other religions, how do people get saved or achieve enlightenment?
- ▶ Why do you think God set up faith as the specific means by which we come into right relationship with Him?
- ▶ What is God's foremost concern? What is most important to Him? (Hint: Look at Ps. 46:10; Isa. 42:8, and Rom. 11:36.)
- ▶ When you trust someone, how does that trust make the person look? How does our faith make God look?
- ▶ How does faith exalt God as good, mighty, beautiful, powerful, and praiseworthy?

Read 2 Chronicles 20:22-28.

- ▶ After Jehoshaphat's victory, how did the people react? Why did they give God so much praise?
- ▶ How does our faith bring God praise?

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ What history do we need to brush up on so we can trust God?
- ▶ What promises do we need to take to heart?
- ▶ How can we show how great God is with our faith this week?