

This midweek study will explore the topic of God's special revelation. 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: Special Revelation

Special revelation refers to God revealing Himself to humanity through historical events, His Word, and through Jesus Christ. Through special revelation, human beings learn about God's character, His will, His purpose for creation, and His plan of redemption. Special revelation shows us the nature and character of God, and because God has revealed Himself in this way, we can know Him—through a saving relationship with Him in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: *Exodus 34:5-7; John 1:1,14; Ephesians 2: 1-6; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3*

1 Special revelation is God revealing Himself through His Word and Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; Heb. 1:1-3).

While God's creation may lead us to conclude there is a Creator, it does not tell us much about His character or how to be reconciled to Him. Through the special revelation of Scripture and Christ, we are given knowledge of God that goes beyond what is we can observe on our own.

2 Special revelation reveals God's character, purpose for creation, and plan for redemption (Ex. 34:5-7; Col. 1:15-20).

Special revelation doesn't only teach us that Jesus existed, it goes deeper to reveal God's character. It reveals Jesus' purpose in creation—from galaxies to humans. And it reveals how people can be redeemed to Christ through His work on the cross—something humans certainly cannot do on their own.

3 Through special revelation we know how to have a relationship with Christ (Eph. 2: 1-6).

Since we are completely separated from God due to sin, something outside of us is our only hope of restoring that relationship. Jesus restores the relationship that we cannot mend on our own. The special revelation of Scripture reveals how Jesus made that relationship possible. Without special revelation, we couldn't know how to have this relationship.

Opening Activity

Begin with an activity inviting students to identify common knowledge items or people (a picture of the President; the moon; logos for commons brands like Nike, Under Armor, or Coke; etc.). Explain how the activity was extremely easy because these items are things most people recognize—they are common knowledge. In other words, all we have to do is be in the culture for a short time to naturally learn about these things.

Then ask the students to give your birth date or social security number. Explain how this activity was more difficult because these things are not common knowledge, but are special knowledge. Knowledge of personal numbers and birthdays must be provided in some way by the person holding the information. Tell students they will learn how special revelation works and this revelation only comes from God Himself.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Jesus" by Chris Tomlin
(*Never Lose Sight*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2016)
- ▶ "Word of God Speak" by MercyMe
(*Spoken For*, Fair Trade Services, 2002)
- ▶ "This Is Our God" by Hillsong Live
(*This Is Our God*, Hillsong Music, 2010)
- ▶ "Say the Word" by Hillsong UNITED
(*Empires*, Hillsong Music, 2015)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "What Is God's Will?" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "Rest in God's Word" *BluefishTV.com*

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1 Special revelation is God revealing Himself through His Word and Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; Heb. 1:1-3).

Option: Invite students to list things that illustrate the difference between general revelation and special revelation?

- ▶ *What are the primary ways general revelation and special revelation differ?*

Read John 1:1,14.

- ▶ *How does this passage demonstrate special revelation?*

Not only was God the Father active in Creation, but Jesus was also with God in the beginning.

- ▶ *How does this particular instance of special revelation affect your view of Jesus?*

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

The special revelation of Scripture is very clear about Jesus' identity as God.

- ▶ *How does Scripture being special revelation validate Jesus being God?*
- ▶ *How does Jesus being special revelation validate Scripture?*

2 Special revelation reveals God's character, purpose for creation, and plan for redemption (Ex. 34:5-7; Col. 1:15-20).

Option: Instruct students to partner with someone they don't know well. Ask them to share three interesting facts about themselves with the other person. After the activity, ask them how they know the other person better after gaining "special knowledge" from that person.

- ▶ *How does special revelation cause us to know God better? How does it help us discern His will?*

Special revelation assists believers in not only knowing mere facts about God, but also knowing His character, His thoughts, and His plans for the future.

Read Exodus 34:5-7 and Colossians 1:15-20.

- ▶ *Describe some of the character attributes of God we know from the special revelation of Scripture?*

- ▶ *What do we learn about Jesus' mission and plan for humanity from the special revelation of Scripture?*

Through the special revelation of Christ found in Scripture, we can trust that what God says about His character, purposes, and plans is true.

- ▶ *How does special revelation change how you read your Bible? What should your response to God's Word be, knowing it is special revelation?*

3 Through special revelation we know how to have a relationship with Christ (Eph. 2: 1-6).

Read Ephesians 2: 1-6.

Having a relationship with Christ isn't something God left us to figure out on our own. God gave us His special revelation so we can trust Him more completely.

- ▶ *How does special revelation help believers have assurance that Jesus is the only way of salvation?*

The Scriptures teach that Jesus saving humanity wasn't an afterthought, but was God's plan from the very beginning because of His loving-kindness.

- ▶ *How does it affect you to know God wants to reveal Himself to you because He loves you deeply?*
- ▶ *How does God providing special revelation to His people prove His love for us?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How does special revelation affect your relationship with Jesus?*
- ▶ *How does special revelation give you a greater confidence in the gospel?*

Challenge students to not only be in awe and wonder of the general revelation God provided in nature and in the world, but also to be more in awe of the special revelation of Jesus Christ found in Scripture.

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

Essential Doctrine: God is Merciful

Mercy refers to God's compassion and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:5). Both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace. If one could, then it would no longer be the free gift of mercy or grace.

Scripture: *Psalm 145:8; Ephesians 2:4-6; Hebrews 4:16; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:9*

1 God's compassion is shown through mercy (Ps. 145:8, Heb. 4:16).

When we have compassion, we are seeking the other person's well-being in a situation where they might be vulnerable. God could rightly judge us due to our sin, but instead He seeks our well-being and repentance because He loves us. The primary way God shows compassion is through mercy.

2 God's mercy is often shown by withholding something (Eph. 2:4-6).

God's blessings not only come by Him giving us things we desire and want, but also come in the form of Him not giving us something we may want that is wrong for us. God works for our good and joy, which means that in certain instances, God may withhold something we desire if He knows it will not result in our good and joy in the long run.

3 God's mercy is undeserved (Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:9).

There is nothing we can do to deserve God's favor, and there is nothing we can do to earn God's mercy. As with God's love and grace, His mercy is also undeserved by us and should be viewed as a gift, not a right we are owed.

Opening Activity

Begin by inviting students to share with the group about a time when someone showed them mercy. Explain that mercy is not getting what you deserve, whereas grace is getting something you don't deserve. Ask the students to share the emotions they experienced after they received mercy for something they truly did wrong. Lead a short time of discussion of how it made them feel about their behavior, the one who gave mercy, and how it made them grow as a person.

Explain to students that God desires to show mercy and compassion to humanity. Today, we will examine the truth that God is merciful.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Come As You Are" by Crowder
(*Neon Steeple*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records)
- ▶ "Blessed Be" by Jason Gray
(*All the Lovely Losers*, Centricity Music, 2010)
- ▶ "Beautiful, Beautiful" by Francesca Battistelli
(*My Paper Heart [Bonus Track Version]*, Word Entertainment, 2008)
- ▶ "Alive (Mary Magdalene)" by Natalie Grant
(*Music Inspired By the Story*, EMI Christian Music Group, 2011)

Video Idea

- ▶ "Saving the Runt" *WingClips.com*

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1 God's compassion is shown through mercy (Ps. 145:8; Heb. 4:16).

Invite students to list situations where they are tempted not to show mercy.

- ▶ *What may be the long-term effects on our witness if we don't show mercy to others?*

Read Psalm 145.8.

- ▶ *How does this passage describe the action of mercy?*
Not only does the Bible say God exhibits these attitudes, it also describes them as His character attributes.
- ▶ *What would your life look like if mercy wasn't only a behavior, but an attribute of your character?*

Read Hebrews 4.16.

The Bible assumes those who approach God in faith for mercy will always find it.

- ▶ *How have you ever been tempted to question God's compassion and mercy?*
- ▶ *What does it say about the nature of God that He always offers mercy for those who repent?*

2 God's mercy is often shown by withholding something (Eph. 2:4-6).

Option: Ask students to remember a time that they did something wrong and their parents forgave them instead of giving a punishment, or a teacher gave them a second chance to find the correct answers to a test they failed. Explain that, in those situations, the parents and teachers showed mercy—they didn't give the students the punishment (or grade) they deserved. Instead, they gave the students a second chance.

- ▶ *How does God show His mercy by withholding something from us?*
Blessings are not always in getting something—they are also in not getting what we do deserve. Mercy is an example of God's blessing.

Read Ephesians 2:4-6.

- ▶ *According to this passage, what is the ultimate reason God shows compassion?*
- ▶ *When God has mercy on us, what does the passage say He does with those who believe in Him?*

There are numerous situations in Scripture where God blesses by giving, but there are just as many examples of mercy of God blessing by withholding. Sometimes the Bible refers to withholding with the word *relenting*.

- ▶ *How have you seen the hand of God blessing you with mercy in His relenting to give you what you deserve? How does God's relenting mercy reveal His love?*

3 God's mercy is undeserved (Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:9).

Read 1 John 1:9 and Titus 3:5.

There are a lot of words associated with the word *undeserved*: *inadequate, coming up short, missing the mark, incapable*, and so on. When it comes to God's mercy, all of these words apply to us. We don't deserve God's mercy—however, He gives it to us abundantly.

- ▶ *Why would we say God's mercy is undeserved? If it's undeserved, how could we ever receive it?*
Through Christ we find a mediator, the only One who is truly deserving of God's love. It's through Christ's sacrifice that we are also counted worthy.
- ▶ *What should be our consistent attitude toward Christ in light of His mercy toward us?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *In what ways does God's mercy impact your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behavior?*
- ▶ *What does God's mercy teach us about the truth of the gospel?*
Challenge students to remember that both mercy and grace are undeserved, meaning humanity can do nothing to earn God's mercy and grace.

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to be concerned about social issues and show Christ's love to all people. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Social Concern

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the Spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends, Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth (Mic. 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

Scripture: *Exodus 20:3-17; Deuteronomy 10:12; Matthew 5:13-16, 43-48; James 1:27; 2:8*

1 All Christians are commanded to pursue God's will in their lives and in society (Ex. 20:3-17; Deut. 10:12).

While we have a personal faith and emphasize a personal savior in Christ, believers are not limited to personal expressions of faith. We share, make our case, and plead with others from a Christian worldview; however, we do not force agreement, but pursue God wholeheartedly both privately and publicly.

2 Christians are commanded to oppose racism and defend the vulnerable (Jas. 1:27; 2:8).

Christians should be the leading the way as champions of anti-racism. We should also be the most clear defenders of the vulnerable in our society in whatever ways we find a person's vulnerability being hurt or exploited.

3 Christians should be visible in the world without compromising their loyalty to Christ (Matt. 5:13-16, 43-48).

Christians are to work with those who want to make society better without compromising their loyalty to Christ. This can be a tight rope to walk, but as Christians, our loyalty to Christ comes first. Our desire to be visible in the world and help make society better is secondary next to our loyalty to Christ. When Christ is truly glorified, society will naturally become better as a result.

Opening Activity

Explain to students that today we will study the role social concerns play in our faith and how Christians can address issues of injustice, racism, bias, and other separations with the gospel. We will also discuss how we can learn to live as fully engaged Christians in a culture that seems more and more resistant to Christian faith.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "All the Poor and Powerless" by All Sons & Daughters (*Season One*, Integrity Music, 2012)
- ▶ "Welcome to America" by Lecrae (*Anomaly*, Reach Records, 2014)
- ▶ "Awakening" by Chris Tomlin (*Passion: Awakening [Deluxe Edition]*, Sparrow Records/sixstepsrecords, 2010)
- ▶ "King of Heaven" by Charlie Hall (*Passion: Awakening [Deluxe Edition]*, Sparrow Records/sixstepsrecords, 2010)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Kid President: I think we all need a pep talk" [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v831111111)
- ▶ "Change the World" [Skitguys.com](https://www.skitguys.com)

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1 All Christians are commanded to pursue God's will in their lives and in society (Ex. 20:3-17; Deut. 10:12).

Option: Before you work through the passages and questions that follow, ask students these questions. *Is it possible to have faith that you hold privately, but not publicly? Is it possible to have a faith that doesn't affect how you interact at school, in your family, and in larger society as a whole?*

- ▶ *Why is it that Christians are commanded to have a personal faith and share that faith in society?*

Read Exodus 20: 3-17.

- ▶ *What does it say about our faith when we take it just as seriously outside the church as we do inside?*

God commands believers to have no other gods before Him. This command includes our status, relationships, popularity, appearance, or anything that could get in the way of making His will supreme in our life.

- ▶ *How does the way we think about God determine how we interact with the outside world?*

Read Deuteronomy 10:12.

While the rest of the world may have been pagan, God still commanded Israel to stay true to His commands. He told His people not to depart from His laws, even when surrounded by unbelieving cultures.

- ▶ *How does God command believers to behave in a society today that may not acknowledge Him?*
- ▶ *What are some ways you can "walk in all the ways" of God within culture?*

2 Christians are commanded to oppose racism and defend the vulnerable (Jas. 1:27; 2:8).

Option: Ask students to name some people who are vulnerable and marginalized in society. Then, discuss what it means to devalue and exploit the vulnerable. Place students into groups and assign them one of the vulnerable or marginalized group of people you listed. Instruct students to discover ways the gospel calls believers to defend and assist these individuals, and then share them with the larger group.

- ▶ *What does it say about God that He commands His believers to oppose racism and defend those who are vulnerable?*

Opposing racism and defending the vulnerable doesn't mean we view others as charity cases; instead, it means we see others as Christ sees them—people created in the image of God.

Read James 1:27 and 2:8.

- ▶ *In what ways you can oppose racism and defend the vulnerable in your sphere of influence?*
- ▶ *What does opposing racism and defending the vulnerable say about your belief and trust in the gospel?*
We are not called to simply love our neighbors, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- ▶ *How is loving your neighbor as yourself different from simply being nice and kind?*

3 Christians should be visible in the world without compromising their loyalty to Christ (Matt. 5:13-16,43-48).

Read Matthew 5:13-16,43-48.

Believers are not called to only have private beliefs—we are called to be a "city on a hill." This means we are in the world, not as secret believers, but as those who are loyal to Christ.

- ▶ *What happens to our witness if it is known we are believers but fail to act as a "city on a hill" to others?*
- ▶ *How can you transform from a Christian with a private faith to one who's a "city on a hill"?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How might your life need to change to better reflect you have a public and private faith?*

Challenge students to know their faith should lead them to social concern by defending the vulnerable and opposing racism, all-the-while living visibly in the world without compromising their loyalty to Christ.

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to recognize their need for repentance. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Repentance

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

Scripture: *Psalm 119:57-60; Matthew 3:8; Luke 5:1-11; Acts 26:15-20; 2 Corinthians 7:10*

1 Repentance is genuine sorrow over sin (Luke 5:1-11; 2 Cor. 7:10).

Many things in life can be faked or forged, but repentance of sin cannot be faked with God. True repentance requires us to acknowledge that we did something that hindered our holiness and that we offended God by breaking His law.

2 Repentance is turning from your sin and toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20).

Like driving a car, you're always going toward something. If you turn from your sin, you must be moving toward Christ. In fact, if you turn away from sin, it is the only way you can go or you are remaining in sin. To turn from your sin and turn toward Christ are two sides of the same coin—you cannot do one without the other.

3 Repentance is shown through a transformed life and lasting change (Ps. 119:57-60; Matt. 3:8).

When we are transformed and changed, it doesn't mean we aren't tempted or don't fail occasionally in our walk with Christ. However, it does mean we don't live in relationship to our sin the way we used to. When we truly repent and life-change occurs, we don't find happiness and joy in the activities that separated us from fellowship with God. We live a different life and the change is lasting.

Opening Activity

Place students into groups and ask them to give detailed, exact instructions to the nearest major city (or location in a city). Bring in a GPS (or use the GPS on your phone) as an object lesson. Instruct students to compare their directions to those the GPS gives. Would you trust their directions or the GPS?

Ask students what happens when the GPS notices you've gone the wrong way. The device will constantly alert you to the driving error until it is corrected. Ask students what would happen if, instead, you insisted on going your own way and ignored the GPS. More than likely, you would become more off-course. To correct the error, you would have to admit you made a mistake, make the suggested turn, and trust the GPS until you arrived at your destination.

Tell students that they will learn about what is involved in repenting from sin. Like correcting a driving path, repentance involves admitting you're wrong, turning from the wrong direction and moving in the right direction, and then remaining on that path. Repentance isn't just behavior modification, it's a reorienting of your life toward Christ and His purposes. Today, we will explore repentance.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Keep Making Me" by Sidewalk Prophets (*Live Like That*, Word Entertainment, 2012)
- ▶ "Chain Breaker" by Zach Williams (*Chain Breaker—EP*, Provident Label Group, 2016)
- ▶ "Lord, I Need You" by Matt Maher (*All the People Said Amen [Live]*, Provident Label Group, 2013)
- ▶ "Rise" by Danny Gokey (*Rise*, BMG Rights Management, 2016)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Dust" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "I Want to Believe" *WingClips.com*

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1 Repentance is genuine sorrow over sin (Luke 5:1-11; 2 Cor. 7:10).

Repentance can sometimes have a depressing tone to it because we have acknowledge something bad, but sorrow over repentance is actually a good thing; it is evidence of the Holy Spirit working in your life.

- ▶ *What is the difference between true repentance and just feeling guilty?*

Read Luke 5:1-11.

- ▶ *What does Jesus do with someone who has a repentant heart? What effect does repentance have on a person?*

Jesus took ordinary individuals who were aware of their sinfulness, and made them powerful disciples after they repented. They weren't perfect, but they truly repented and trusted Christ for forgiveness.

- ▶ *How would your life be different if you truly repented and trusted Christ for forgiveness?*

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10.

Godly sorrow leads to the removal of sin and regret. Godly repentance is the first step in having a relationship with God.

- ▶ *What is preventing you from taking that step of repentance in faith toward Christ?*

2 Repentance is turning from your sin and toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20).

Option: Play a round or two of "Hokey Pokey." Instruct students that while this is a fun kids' game, it contains something true about our walk with Christ. The song says, "You do the Hokey Pokey and you turn yourself around. That's what it all about." As we walk with Christ, we do certain things that displease God. Eventually, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we come to a place where we trust Jesus to "turn us around" through repentance. And, like the song says, "That's what it's all about." Christian repentance is about responding to the Holy Spirit's conviction and allowing Him to turn us around for good.

- ▶ *What are the specific ways you need to repent and allow the Spirit to turn you around?*

Repentance is the admission that you don't have it all together. Part of being repentant is admitting that you aren't the center of the universe and putting God in the proper place in your life.

Read Acts 26:15-20.

- ▶ *What does it say about God that He made a way to rescue people from their sin even when they were in clear rebellion against Him?*
- ▶ *Why is repentance so important when it comes to knowing Christ?*

We are not only called to turn from sin, but we are also called to turn toward Christ when we repent.

3 Repentance is shown through a transformed life and lasting change (Ps. 119:57-60; Matt. 3:8).

Read Psalm 119:57-60 and Matthew 3:8.

Repentance isn't a momentary decision. When we repent, we acknowledge our wrong-doing and commit to living a life transformed with lasting change.

- ▶ *What does it look like for someone to say they have repented but lack true life change?*

Repentance and life-change go hand-in-hand. If there is true repentance, then true life change will be shown as well. You can't have one without the other.

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *What do you need to express genuine sorrow over?*
- ▶ *What things do you need to turn from and what are some ways you can turn toward Christ?*

Challenge students to know repentance is the human aspect to God's work of regeneration, helping us to see what takes place from the human side of conversion.

This midweek study will explore how justification comes through faith alone in Christ alone. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Justification by Faith

Justification refers to the moment when 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 and 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 3:23-24; 5:1; 8:33-3; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 2:8-9*

1 Justification is the moment you are declared righteous before God (Rom. 5:1; 8:33-34).

Justification of our sins is not symbolic or metaphorical—it is completely real. We are actually declared legally innocent of our sin and guilt, free before God. Once we are justified, that declaration is permanent. It is legal and permanent because our sin was paid for by Christ's work on the cross.

2 Justification takes place through faith in Christ, not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9).

Since we do not have the authority or ability to pay for or forgive sin, our justification is accomplished through faith in Christ alone. Good works, as good as they are, always come up short when held to the standard required to pay our sin debt. Faith in Christ and in the righteousness that only He supplies is what provides acceptance and grants justification in God's eyes.

3 You are adopted into the family of God when you are justified (Rom. 3:23-24; Gal. 3:26).

Once you are justified, there is no waiting period until you are a member of the family of God. You don't have to go through a number of classes, pass a test, or show your competence to be a part of the body of Christ. Once you are declared justified—when you place your faith in Christ alone—you are adopted into the family of God.

Opening Activity

Show students different pictures of the Queen of England, local judges, a college president, the President of the United States, and so on. Tell students there is a common thread among those in the pictures we just saw. The individuals in the pictures have the power to make declarations about a person. The Queen can declare a person a knight, a judge can declare innocence or guilt, a college president can confer degrees on a graduate, and the President of the United States can declare offices and pardon sentences.

Once the person with the authority makes the declaration it's true and final. When God, with His authority, declares someone justified, they are righteous before Him. There is nothing anyone can say or do to change that declaration, because God is the highest authority. Explain to students that they will learn how our justification is made by faith alone in Christ. Today, we will explore the topic of justification by faith.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "My Victory" by Crowder
(*American Prodigal*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2016)
- ▶ "Faith to Believe" by Shane & Shane
(*Bring Your Nothing*, Fair Trade Services, 2013)
- ▶ "How Can It Be?" by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ "You Call Me Justified" by Shawn Newby
(*Justified*, Shawn Newby, 2016)

Video Idea

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

This midweek study will explore how justification comes through faith alone in Christ alone. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Justification by Faith

Justification refers to the moment when 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 and 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.

1 Justification is the moment you are declared righteous before God (Rom. 5:1; 8:33-34).

Justification happens instantaneously. You don’t have to wait to be justified. When you are in Christ, you are as justified as you’ll ever be.

- ▶ *How does it feel to know that from the moment you placed your faith in Christ, you were cleansed of all sin—past, present, and future?*

Read Romans 5:1.

- ▶ *Why is faith the only thing that will lead to our being justified in Christ?*

The justification of the Holy Spirit is the action that literally leaves you completely, legally, free from sin and Satan’s grip on you. After you are justified, you are Christ’s forever.

- ▶ *Why would this verse state that it’s our justification that leads to peace with God?*

Read Romans 8:33-34.

Because of our justification in Christ, not only is Satan stripped of his claim on us, but we are also conquerors over sin and death.

2 Justification takes place through faith in Christ, not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9).

Option: Offer a substantial prize to any student able to throw a ball at 70 miles per hour. Hopefully, some sporty students will take you up on the offer. Next, give the student a wiffle ball. Allow three opportunities to throw the ball 70 miles per hour. Regardless of how good an athlete that person may be, the reality is that throwing a wiffle ball at 70 miles per hour is impossible.

Explain to students that regardless of your personal kindness, goodness, or personal piety, trying to earn one’s salvation through works and not faith alone is like trying to earn the substantial prize by throwing a wiffle ball 70 miles per hour—it just won’t work.

Read Ephesians 2:8-9.

- ▶ *According to this verse, what is the main reason our justification is not a result of works?*

- ▶ *If people could earn their own salvation from God, what might it give them a right to do?*

Our justification is a gift from God. It prevents us from thinking we can earn it or being in the driver’s seat of our own salvation.

- ▶ *What are some specific ways we are tempted to try to earn our own salvation?*

3 You are adopted into the family of God when you are justified (Rom. 3:23-24; Gal. 3:26).

Read Romans 3:23-24 and Galatians 3:26.

Once you have been justified you are as much a son or daughter of King Jesus as any one else. At the moment of your justification, you are adopted into the kingdom of Christ.

- ▶ *What images come to mind when you think of being adopted by God?*

Justification is a permanent aspect of your life. You never have to wonder if your sin can separate you from it. While justification is permanent, it also should be accompanied by good fruits on behalf of the person who is justified.

- ▶ *Why is it amazing to know your justification is permanent?*
- ▶ *How does your justification being permanent affect how you live your life in Christ?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *Does your life reflect that you’re declared justified by the King of kings?*
- ▶ *Are you living a life of gratitude for your justification? If not, how can you start?*

Challenge students to know justification is permanent, real, and through faith alone for salvation.

This midweek study will explore what hell is like and the eternal punishment that awaits unbelievers there. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Nature of Hell

For those who are not found in Christ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God's condemnation remains upon them (John 3:36) and that they will be judged according to their deeds done on earth (Heb. 9:27). The punishment that awaits unbelievers in hell is an eternal, never-ending suffering that comes from sins committed against an infinite God (Matt. 25:41,46). In hell, sinners are forever separated from God.

Scripture: *Matthew 25:41,46; John 3:36; Hebrews 9:27*

1 In Hell, God's condemnation remains upon sinners (John 3:36).

Since the condemnation of sin has not been removed, those who have not placed their faith in Christ will be separated from God in hell. Let's be clear: Everyone deserves hell. However, those who place their faith in Christ alone will escape hell because they have been justified by Christ's work on the cross.

2 Those who are not in Christ will be judged according to their works on Earth (Heb. 9:27).

While those in Christ are judged according to the work Christ has done on their behalf, those who do not trust Christ as Savior will be judged according to their own works. Scripture teaches that our works, regardless of how good, are not enough to deserve salvation.

3 Hell is eternal separation from God (Matt. 25:41,46)

Hell is the place where an individual's desire to reject God is made permanent. As there is no one who can remove you from heaven, sadly, the same is true in hell. Hell is permanent, and a person is conscious about what is happening there. Hell isn't metaphorical or mythical, either. Scripture makes clear that hell is a real place in the same way as heaven is real. There is no hope for rescue once in hell.

Opening Activity

Ask students to come up with a way to understand eternity that even a child could understand. What are some ways we can understand how time goes on into the future without end? Show some of the events in world history that happened 1,000 or more years ago and how that can feel like an eternity. How can we understand 50 million or 10 billion years into the future? Explain that while eternity is extremely difficult to wrap our heads around, the reality is that we will exist in some place 10 billion years from now. The big question is, where will you spend it?

While hell may be an uncomfortable subject to discuss, it is still discussed in the Scriptures. If we want to learn all the Bible says, we must also examine the reality of hell. Explain how each of us may have an idea of hell in our minds already, but we are will look at what the Bible says about hell and take our understanding from what Scripture says.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "It's Your Life" by Francesca Battistelli
(*My Paper Heart [Bonus Track Version]*, Word Entertainment, 2008)
- ▶ "Out of Hell" by Skillet
(*Unleashed*, Atlantic Recording Company, 2016)
- ▶ "It Is Well" by Bethel Music
(*You Make Me Brave*, Bethel Music, 2014)
- ▶ "Heaven & Earth" by Phil Wickham
(*Heaven & Earth [Bonus Track Version]*, Fair Trade Services, 2009)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Hell Over Coffee" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "World vs Christian: Sheep and Goats" *Skitguys.com*

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1 In Hell, God's condemnation remains upon sinners (John 3:36).

While there is always hope on earth for the unbeliever to repent and turn to Christ, in hell this reality (so often taken for granted on earth) is no longer an option. God's condemnation rests on sinners eternally in hell.

- ▶ *How does hell being eternal remind you of the urgency of the gospel and encourage you to evangelism?*

Read John 3:36.

- ▶ *Why does rejection of Jesus merit the punishment of hell for eternity?*

The only hope for escaping hell is not in our works or charity, but in our relationship with Christ. Jesus is the only one who has the ability to remove the wrath of God from sinners.

- ▶ *Why is it impossible to spend enough time in hell for our sin debt to be paid?*

Because God's condemnation rests on all unbelievers in hell, it is extremely important to take our task as evangelists seriously.

- ▶ *How does God's condemnation affect the way you interact with those you encounter on a daily basis?*
- ▶ *Does this reality change how you view your time on earth?*

2 Those who are not in Christ will be judged according to their works on Earth (Heb. 9:27).

Read Hebrews 9:27.

- ▶ *According to this verse, what occurs immediately after death?*
- ▶ *If you were to be judged according to your earthly works what could you possibly offer God to earn your salvation? How does this make you feel?*

We will ultimately be judged on one of two things: our works, or the work done by Christ on our behalf.

- ▶ *Who's work are you most trusting for where you spend eternity?*

3 Hell is eternal separation from God (Matt. 25:41,46)

Read Matthew 25:41,46.

Hell isn't a temporary holding spot until you've learned your spiritual lesson, like a glorified "time out." Hell is the eternal and conscious punishment for sin and rejecting Christ.

- ▶ *What effect does hell being eternal have on how you think about your relationship with Christ?*

Hell is a conscious state—it's not a place where you are separated from God but are in a coma-like state. Nor does hell have its "not so bad" times and places. Hell is the place where everything God has deemed good is completely removed, along with His Spirit.

- ▶ *Why is the removal of everything God deems good a frightening prospect in light of eternity?*
- ▶ *How does hell being more than a glorified "time out" affect your thinking about it?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *If you're a believer, what urgent steps are you taking to be a light to those who don't know God's forgiveness in Christ?*

Challenge students to realize if they were to be judged on their good works, instead of Christ's work on the cross, God's condemnation would remain on them in a conscious, permanent, and eternal place called hell.

This midweek study will explore the importance of Jesus' miracles in demonstrating His glory and revealing His identity as God's Son. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Miracles

A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order of things, or supersedes natural laws, for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; miraculous signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

Scripture: *Jeremiah 32:27; Matthew 9:5-7; 17:20; Mark 6:49-50; John 14:12*

1 Miracles are events where God suspends the natural order of things to demonstrate His glory (Jer. 32:27; Mark 6:49-50).

As human beings, we are limited to acting in space and time and according to certain physical laws. However, God can suspend or supersede those laws and do whatever He pleases at any point. This demonstrates His authority and rule over and above creation and demonstrates His power and glory.

2 Miracles were often present when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message (Matt. 9:5-7).

When God wanted to ensure His people that His presence and approval was with a certain prophet or apostle, that person was granted the ability to be a conduit of the miraculous. We see this evidenced in the lives of Moses, Elijah, the disciples, and Paul.

3 God is personally involved in the world and still performs miracles today (Matt. 17:20, John 14:12).

As believers in Christ, we don't believe God takes His hand off of the world and is no longer involved. God still is involved in circumstances of His choosing to perform miracles for the purpose of bring greater glory to His name and to ensure that His Name is spoken throughout the world.

Opening Activity

How would you explain a miracle to someone who has no concept of the miraculous? Ask students to describe the difference between a miraculous occurrence and something that appeared to work very well in your favor. Have you ever witnessed a true miracle, something you couldn't explain?

Explain to the students that miracles aren't simply random acts where things work to our advantage. Miracles are events where God suspends the natural order of the universe in order to draw attention to Himself and to bring Himself glory. God is the only One capable of doing miracles. Even those who seemed to do miracles in the Bible performed those miracles through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tell the students that today we will examine the topic of miracles and seek to understand their purpose.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Miracles" by Newsboys
(*Born Again [Miracles Edition]*, Inpop Records, 2011)
- ▶ "Magnify" by We Are Messengers
(*We Are Messengers*, Word Entertainment, 2016)
- ▶ "Come Alive (Dry Bones)" by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ "Great Are You Lord" by One Sonic Society
(*Great Are You Lord – EP*, Provident Label Group, 2016)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Fully Human, Fully God" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "The Music of Miracles" *BlueFishTV.com*

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1 Miracles are events where God suspends the natural order of things to demonstrate His glory

(Jer. 32:27; Mark 6:49-50).

We are incapable of doing miracles because we are not God—we are part of the created order. God can act however He chooses and has the authority to suspend the laws of nature for His glory because God is not natural, but supernatural.

- ▶ *How did God suspend the natural order of things to demonstrate His glory in Scripture?*

Read Jeremiah 32:27.

- ▶ *What does it say about God's power that things that are impossible for us are easy for Him?*

God frequently uses the miraculous in Scripture to demonstrate His power. Not only do miracles show God's glory, but they also bring confidence to those who trust in Christ that He is the true and living God.

- ▶ *How does knowing God can suspend the natural order of things give you greater confidence in Him?*

Read Mark 6:49-50.

Jesus Himself walked on the water to encourage and confirm to His disciples that He was God and that they shouldn't be afraid.

- ▶ *Why does a miracle-working God reduce your fear in life?*
- ▶ *How do you think the disciples' mentality about Jesus changed after they witnessed Him walking on the water?*

2 Miracles were often present when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message (Matt. 9:5-7).

Option: Throughout the lesson, give candy to students every time they answer a question correctly. After a while, they will become more participatory, knowing a "blessing" accompanies following your lesson. When time for this point comes, explain that while giving candy isn't a miracle, it illustrates something interesting about miracles. In the same way a piece of candy invites you to participate in the lesson (knowing good things come from participation), miracles are things that God reveals to His

followers to remind them of His goodness, power, authority, and favor. They remind believers that, while they don't happen all the time, miracles are performed to give them greater faith in Christ.

Read Matthew 9:5-7.

- ▶ *How was the man in this story rewarded for His great faith?*
- ▶ *What was the overall impact that the miracle of Jesus had on those who witnessed the miracle?*

Miracles aren't magic tricks—they are specific tools God uses intentionally in the lives His followers.

- ▶ *What are some examples from Scripture where a prophet or apostle was given a miracle when speaking God's message?*

3 God is personally involved in the world and still performs miracles today (Matt. 17:20, John 14:12).

Read Matthew 17:20 and John 14:12.

Miracles are not limited to events found in Scripture, they still happen today. While the greatest miracle of all is your salvation, God still performs miracles at times and places of His choosing alone.

- ▶ *Have you thought about how God is working a miracle through you sharing the gospel with others?*

Christ promised His believers if they trusted Him that they would do even greater works. Even though that's an amazing thought, Christ has given us the power to do amazing things if we would trust Him.

- ▶ *Why would Christ say that believers "will do even greater works than these" if we loved Him?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How has your thinking about the miraculous changed over the course of this discussion?*

Challenge students to know miracles happen when God suspends the natural order for His glory, were present when prophets spoke God's message, and that miracles still happen today.

This midweek study will explore why it's important for students to recognize Jesus' deity—that He is fully divine and fully human. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Jesus' Deity

Within the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures—the divine nature and the human nature. Scripture teaches He is fully divine and fully human. His divinity is on display in passages that describe Him as being equal with God (John 1:1-18; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:1-3). The New Testament also points to the deity of Christ by showing how He possesses attributes that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4), how He performs works that only God performs (Mark 2:5-12; John 10:28; 17:2), and how He Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58; 10:30; 17:5).

Scripture: Micah 5:2; Matt. 26:63-64; John 1:4,1-1; 8:58; Hebrews 1:1-3

1 The Bible claims Jesus is equal with God

(John 1:1-18, Heb. 1:1-3).

Jesus' divinity wasn't something church historians made up or something that slowly emerged over the course of history in order to make Jesus appear much greater than He was. The Bible itself makes this claim about His divinity.

2 Jesus possesses characteristics that God alone possesses

(Mic. 5:2; John 1:4).

If someone claims to be God, then surely they must be able to do the things which God alone can do. This is certainly true with Jesus. Jesus is able to perform miracles, forgive sin, has power of death, and is from eternity past. All of these are characteristics that God alone possesses.

3 Jesus Himself claims to be the Son of God

(Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58).

Again, Jesus' divinity wasn't something conferred on Him by a counsel of religious leaders or that slowly emerged later in the church. Jesus' claims of divinity came from His very lips. In fact, His claim to be divine was one of the reasons the religious leaders of the day wanted Him killed. Jesus Himself claimed to be God.

Opening Activity

Ask students to name some champions they know. Maybe show some slides of great champions throughout history. Students may come up with Olympic champions, local athletic champions, or champions of some obscure sport or activity. Discuss with students how they know for a fact that a particular person is a champion. How can people definitively claim that they are what their titles claim?

What signs need to be present to make someone's claim to be a champion verifiable and true? More than likely they'll have to have a few things going for them to be called a champion. First, the judges of the competition all agree that person is the champion. Second, the champion must possess skills and qualities that make someone a champion in their field. Third, the champion accepts the title and position. Explain how, like a champion can be objectively proven, the claims Scripture makes about Jesus being God also meet these criteria. The Bible verifies Jesus' divinity—it tells us that Jesus possess the qualities and characteristics that only God Himself possesses and Jesus Himself affirms that He is divine. Explain to students that we will examine the topic of Jesus' deity.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Jesus, Son of God" by Passion
(*White Flag*, sixstepsrecords/Sparrow Records, 2012)
- ▶ "Because He Lives" by Matt Maher
(*Saints and Sinners*, Provident Label Group, 2015)
- ▶ "My God" by Jeremy Camp
(*Reckless*, Capitol Christian Music Group, 2013)
- ▶ "King Of The World" by Natalie Grant
(*Be One*, Curb Records, 2015)

Video Idea

- ▶ "Thy Name" *Skitguys.com*

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1 The Bible claims Jesus is equal with God (John 1:1-18, Heb. 1:1-3).

Not only does Jesus claim to be equal with God, He actually claims to be God. He was at creation and the Bible says everything created was created through Jesus.

- ▶ *How does the Bible's claim of Jesus being God shape what you think and believe about Jesus?*

Read John 1:1-18.

- ▶ *Why it is important for Jesus to have existed from eternity past?*

Not only did Jesus exist from eternity past, but the Bible also says nothing was made apart from Jesus Himself making it.

- ▶ *How does Jesus being creator of everything effect how you think about Jesus the man on earth?*

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

The Bible says that Jesus is the exact representation of God's being. Jesus is not a close copy or a realistic duplicate. God the Father and Jesus the Son are the exact representation of the other.

- ▶ *How does it affect your belief about God knowing that Jesus is not a copy, but the exact representation of God?*

2 Jesus possesses characteristics that God alone possesses (Mic. 5:2; John 1:4).

Option: Show pictures of DNA. Explain how a DNA match for two people is so precise it is unquestionable. If your DNA matches what was found at a crime scene, either you were there or someone had access to your blood or hair. Matching DNA can also be used to prove family relationships. There are certain characteristics about you and your family that only you possess. Jesus possesses the exact same characteristics as God the Father. You cannot separate the two. Just as DNA is the representation of who you are, Jesus is God the Father's exact representation.

Read Micah 5:2 and John 1:4.

- ▶ *What does it say about the characteristics of Jesus for John to say, "In Him was life"?*

- ▶ *What characteristics do you think John was talking about when he said Jesus' life was "the light"?*

While we may have characteristics in common with God because we are made in His image, Jesus possess characteristics in common with God's divine nature.

- ▶ *What are the characteristics of God that Jesus possesses that everyone else does not?*

3 Jesus Himself claims to be the Son of God (Matt. 26:63-64; John 8:58).

Read Matthew 26:63-6 and John 8:58.

Jesus claimed to be God, and wasn't vague about that claim, either. He said it outright, even when the religious leaders of the day wanted to kill Him for blasphemy.

- ▶ *Why is it extremely important that Jesus Himself claimed to be God?*

Jesus' claim to be God wasn't limited to a one or two time occurrence. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus' claim to be God is evident and is the foundation of His coming to earth.

- ▶ *Why are Jesus' repeated claims to be God in the Gospels an important feature?*
- ▶ *How do Jesus' repeated claims to be God affect the way we interpret the rest of His words in the Gospels?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *Why is it important to understand that the Scriptures announced Jesus as God, rather than His unity with God being a title given to Him later in church history?*
- ▶ *How does Jesus' being God separate Him from all the leaders of other religions?*

Challenge students to realize that the Bible claims Jesus is God, Jesus possesses characteristics God alone possesses, and He also repeatedly claimed to be the Son of God in Scripture.

This midweek study will explore how God's creation is good, although distorted because of sin, and how we can preserve the goodness of that creation. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for students.

Essential Doctrine: The Goodness of Creation

In Genesis 1, God repeatedly affirmed that all of His creation was good, even “very good” (1:31). It is good, in God’s judgment, because He created it for a purpose that it fulfilled—to reflect and display the good character of the Creator. Therefore, sin and evil should not be seen as a foundational part of the creation but rather as a corruption of it. While the creation has been marred and distorted as a result of sin, it is still good in the hands of God and serves His purpose of proclaiming His glory in the world. God’s people should affirm and seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (Gen. 2:15).

Scripture: *Genesis 1.31; 2:15; 3:22-24*

1 God affirms creation as good (Gen. 1.31).

Creation wasn’t something God felt neutral about. God absolutely loves His creation and deemed it “good” and “very good.” God has high standards, so when He claims something as “very good” you can rest assured it is exactly as He says.

2 Sin and evil are corruptions of creation (Gen. 3:22-24).

While creation was created as good, sin and evil have crept in and corrupted the good creation God made. Even though sin and evil are in the world, it doesn’t mean the world is not redeemable. It is our responsibility as God’s stewards and caretakers to care for creation in how we treat the earth and by sharing the gospel.

3 God’s people should seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (Gen. 2:15).

As believers, we are stewards of creation. This is why believers should be on the forefront of caring for our planet and the people in it who bear the image of God. Preserving the goodness of creation reflects God’s own providential care over His created order.

Opening Activity

Instruct students to take few minutes and write something they’ve done that they are extremely proud of. Maybe it’s an art project, paper, athletic accomplishment, musical accomplishment, academic award, or something along those lines. Give students a few minutes to brag on themselves about why their accomplishment was amazing, important, and valuable.

Ask students to reflect on why the accomplishment was special to them. Discuss the value of pouring all your love, heart, and soul into a project, and wanting to see it succeed and thrive. You also want others to see and value it the same way you do.

Explain that we will examine the goodness of creation. It is a crowning work of God, in that He deemed it good and worthy for those who would bear His image. We will also talk about the corrupting effects of sin and evil in the world and our responsibility as believers to care for the creation God has made.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ “All of Creation” by MercyMe
(*The Generous Mr. Lovewell*, Fair Trade Services, 2010)
- ▶ “Glory” by Phil Wickham
(*The Ascension*, Fair Trade Services, 2013)
- ▶ “Let Creation Sing” by Hillsong Live
(*God He Reigns*, Hillsong Music, 2010)
- ▶ “Creation Sings the Father’s Song” by Keith and Kristyn Getty
(*Awaken the Dawn*, Getty Music Label, 2009)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ “Which Came First?” *BluefishTV.com*
- ▶ “B. C.” *Skitguys.com*

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1 God affirms creation as good (Gen. 1:31).

Notice that not only does the word *good* approve creation as “good,” but God also says that creation is “very good.” Creation exceeds expectations and goes beyond the status quo. Creation is surpassingly amazing!

- ▶ *In what ways do you notice creation as being a very good gift from God?*

Read Genesis 1:31.

- ▶ *Why do you think God claimed that creation was very good?*
God’s creation isn’t just the earth and sky, it includes you as well. Humanity is the apex of God’s very good creation.
- ▶ *How does it make you feel that when God deems the world “very good” it includes you, too?*
- ▶ *How does this affect your thinking when you are tempted to doubt God created you as unique and special?*

2 Sin and evil are corruptions of creation (Gen. 3:22-24).

Option: Find a large, clear bucket and fill it with water. Show the students how it is full of crystal clear water—no imperfections. Take a few drops of motor oil and drop it in the water. Ask the students about the purity of the water now. Most wouldn’t want to drink the water, because the motor oil has corrupted the purity of the water.

Explain that sin has corrupted the overwhelmingly pure and good creation that God has made. But while there is sin and evil in the world, it doesn’t make it irredeemable. It our job as believers to share the love of Christ to the ends of the earth.

Read Genesis 3:22-24.

- ▶ *What were the consequences of sin immediately after sin entered the world?*
- ▶ *What does this say about how God perceives sin?*
While sin has a debilitating effect on creation, God still has mercy and wants our repentance.
- ▶ *How did God show humans mercy even when they first brought sin into the world?*

3 God’s people should seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation (Gen. 2:15).

Read Genesis 2:15.

Preserving the goodness of creation is both physical and spiritual. We are to care for our planet as well as those in the world whom God has called believers to reach with the gospel.

- ▶ *What are some ways we can fulfill the cultural mandate to be the best stewards of the planet as possible?*
As we are given a cultural mandate to care for the earth, we are also given a Great Commission to reach those who are still in bondage to slavery and sin.
- ▶ *How does sharing Christ with others help preserve the goodness of God’s creation?*
- ▶ *What does being responsible stewards of our planet and being missionary minded say to the outside world?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *In what ways do you show that you believe creation is “very good” in your life?*
Challenge students to realize that God affirms creation as good, but sin and evil are corruptions of creation and God’s people should seek to preserve the goodness of God’s creation.

This midweek study will explore Jesus' role as our Great High Priest and what that means for us. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Christ as Priest

As our Great High Priest, Jesus accomplishes the work of reconciling us to God. He is the One whose perfect righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification. He is the One who intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24) and prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

Scripture: Luke 22:31-32; John 17; 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24

1 Jesus' righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification (1 John 2:1).

As the high priests in the Old Testament would offer sacrifices to God for the people of Israel, Jesus, as our high priest, offers His righteousness on our behalf to God the Father for our justification. Instead of an animal sacrifice, Jesus offers Himself as the sacrifice.

2 Jesus intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24).

Since we cannot sufficiently make our case before God, we need an advocate—a mediator—between us and God. Jesus is the One who intercedes for us much as the priests in the Old Testament would make intercession on behalf of the people before God.

3 Jesus prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

Again, like the priests of the Old Testament praying for the faithfulness of Israel, Jesus also prays for believers to remain faithful to their calling in Christ.

Opening Activity

Utilize different objects where the object's essential function is removed. For example, a guitar with no strings, book with the pages cut out, glasses without lenses, and so on. Discuss what these objects are without their ability to perform their essential function. Obviously, they would be pointless to use and no one would find them worthwhile or valuable.

Explain that one of Jesus' titles is that of priest. In order to be more than just a title, Jesus performs certain functions as Priest in order to present us righteous before God the Father. To fulfill the role of priest in our lives, He performs the function of presenting His righteousness to God for our justification, and He intercedes in prayer for us to the Father and prays that we remain faithful as believers in Christ. While Christ performs many priestly functions in our lives, we will discuss these three ways today.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Your Blood Jesus" by Summit Worship
(*He Shall Reign Forever [Live]*, Summit Church Music, 2015)
- ▶ "Once and for All" by Lauren Daigle
(*How Can It Be*, Centricity Music, 2015)
- ▶ "You Won't Relent" by Misty Edwards
(*Relentless*, Forerunner Music, 2007)
- ▶ "Christ Is Risen" by Matt Maher
(*Alive Again [Extended Edition]*, Provident Label Group, 2011)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "The Skinny on Prayer" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "ThyPhone" *BluefishTV.com*

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1 Jesus' righteousness is presented to the Father for our justification (1 John 2:1).

In His role as High Priest, Jesus presents the sacrifice to God the Father on our behalf much like the priests of the Old Testament. While sacrifices in the Old Testament were animals, the sacrifice Jesus presents is Himself and His righteousness.

- ▶ *How is Jesus functioning as a greater high priest in this situation better than the priests in the Old Testament?*

Read 1 John 2:1.

- ▶ *What does it mean to have an advocate? Why does Jesus need to be our advocate?*

God's desire is that we abstain from sinning; however, if we do sin, Scripture tells us that Jesus is our advocate to the Father. Jesus advocates His righteousness as our own.

- ▶ *How does it affect you to know Jesus is your advocate before the Father?*

2 Jesus intercedes for us before the Father (Heb. 7:25; 9:24).

Option: Ask students to describe a situation in which they defended people who weren't able to defend themselves. Another type of question could be, "Have you've been in a situation where you saw something no one else did, and because of your words, you were able to bring truth to a situation? Has someone ever interceded on your behalf?"

What is the purpose of interceding? Essentially, *intercession* is *defending the defenseless and pleading the case of those who can't defend themselves on their own*. We certainly need Jesus to intercede for us. Without the intercession of Christ, we are completely without defense against the charge of treason against God the Father due to our sin.

Read Hebrews 7:25 and 9:24.

- ▶ *Based on Jesus' intercession, what do these verses tell us about His ability to save sinners?*

- ▶ *What is the ultimate purpose of Jesus' intercession according to the verses we read?*

Intercession isn't merely a conversation between two parties. *Intercession is a defense against a charge that could have lasting consequences.*

- ▶ *What would be the lasting consequence of our sin if Jesus didn't intercede for sinners before the Father?*

3 Jesus prays for us to remain faithful (Luke 22:31-32; John 17).

Read Luke 22:31-32 and John 17.

When we think of prayer, we usually think of us praying to Jesus for others. However, Jesus prays to God the Father for us. Jesus prays for our endurance to live the Christian life and to remain faithful to Him.

- ▶ *Have you thought about Christ praying for you specifically? How does this affect you?*

When we pray for others, we pray for their blessing and success in their walk with Christ. It is interesting that when Jesus prays for us He prays for the same thing, but with the perfect words and perfect motives.

- ▶ *How does it affect you to know that Jesus prays for you perfectly?*
- ▶ *How does the fact that Jesus prays specifically for you change how you pray for others?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How has your thinking about Jesus changed by studying about Him being a high priest?*
- ▶ *What ways can you trust Him better knowing He is your ultimate high priest?*

Challenge students to know Jesus Himself presents His righteousness before the Father on our behalf, intercedes for us, and prays for us to remain faithful.

This midweek study will explore the existence of demons and their role in the world. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Demons

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 and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Though demons have power, they are limited by God's control and can only act within constraints God permits. In the end, all of the demons will be cast into the lake of fire, for which it was originally created.

Scripture: Job 1:6; 2:6; Zechariah 3:1; Matthew 25:41

1 Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1).

Demons used to be angels in heaven. Demons are angels who rebelled against God's authority and chose to follow the angel, Lucifer. God banished these angels from heaven and have since opposed God and sought to destroy His work.

2 The power of demons is limited by God's control (Job 2:6).

While demons certainly wreak havoc in the hearts and minds of people on earth, they are nowhere near as powerful as they could be. God's sovereign rule limits demonic power and keeps it in check. While we do not know what God allows or doesn't allow, we know their power is limited by God.

3 All demons will one day be cast into the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41).

Demons will not have the ability to harm God's creation forever. Eventually, all demonic forces will be sent to the lake of fire along with their leader, Lucifer, and with all who reject Christ while on earth. There is no hope of repentance and salvation for demons.

Opening Activity

Ask students what they typically think of when the word "demonic" is used. Ask students to give example of how the culture presents the demonic. Answers could range from Halloween gimmicks, red suits, pitch forks, cheesy horror movies, and beings that sit on one of your shoulders tempting you with doing something sinful, and so on. You could show pictures to illustrate common caricatures of the demonic such as cartoon characters in red devil outfits or silly Halloween decor. Ask students how these images and items stack up against what is truly demonic.

Today, we will examine the topic of demons: how they function, how they are limited, and what their future holds. Invite the students to resist allowing the demonic characters of Hollywood characters to influence their thinking; instead, encourage them to draw their insight from what Scripture says.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Lion and the Lamb" by Big Daddy Weave
(*Beautiful Offerings*, Word Entertainment, 2015)
- ▶ "Higher" by Unspoken
(*Follow Through*, Centricity Music, 2016)
- ▶ "The One I'm Running To" by 7eventh Time Down
(*Just Say Jesus*, BEC Recordings, 2014)
- ▶ "Guilty" by Newsboys
(*Love Riot*, Fair Trade Services/Columbia, 2016)

Video Idea

- ▶ "Demons" *Skitguys.com*

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1 Demons oppose God and seek to destroy His work (Job 1:6; Zech. 3:1).

Demons possess a completely straightforward, genuine hatred for God and His people. Their sole mission is to disrupt God's plans, God's work, and God's people.

- ▶ *How does it affect you to know that the temptation you experience is done with the sole purpose of harming you?*

Read Job 1:6.

- ▶ *What does it say about the demonic that they masquerade as an angels of light?*

It's no surprise that Satan reveals himself in beautiful ways. How else would anyone agree to anything he says? Everything Satan does is done with the intention to kill, steal, and destroy.

- ▶ *Is it surprising that Satan has to twist what God has already created? What does this say about Lucifer?*

Read Zechariah 3:1.

Demons love to hate; specifically, demons love to hate God and the things of God. One of main goals of demons in your life is to keep you from believing that God loves you and has truly forgiven you of your sin.

- ▶ *Why do demons revel in playing the role of accuser in believers' lives?*
- ▶ *What steps can you take to ensure your confidence in your salvation isn't affected by the accusations of the demonic?*

2 The power of demons is limited by God's control (Job 2:6).

Option: Ask students to try to tie their shoes using only one hand or to try writing their names with their eyes closed. Essentially, you can illustrate this concept using any normal activity with a barrier, resistance, or limitation. While you may still be able to function to a certain extent, you are hindered in accomplishing your task. Explain that God limits demons and only allows them an extremely restricted power.

Read Job 2:6.

- ▶ *How does the Lord restrict the demonic in this passage?*
- ▶ *What might be the purpose of God restricting demonic power rather than eliminating it immediately?*

While we don't know the extent of demonic power, we know that the power of Christ is overwhelmingly sufficient to meet our needs when demons oppress us.

- ▶ *How does it affect you to know that even though demonic activity occurs, God restricts their power?*

3 All demons will one day be cast into the lake of fire (Matt. 25:41).

Demonic activity is not a permanent reality. One day, God will cast Lucifer, all demons, and people who rejected Christ into the lake of fire. This is not a possibility; it is a sure fact.

- ▶ *In what ways does the demons' destiny in hell shape how you view the demonic?*

Not only is hell their destiny, but Jesus says that hell was created specifically for Satan and his angels. Hell is the place God has created specifically to cut off the demonic for eternity.

- ▶ *Why would God feel the need to create a place specifically for the Devil and his angels?*
- ▶ *How might the fact that the demonic know their destiny shape the way they interact in the world today?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How has your thinking about the demonic been shaped as a result of this study?*

Challenge students to know that demons oppose God and His work, but are limited by God's control and will one day be cast into the lake of fire. We can trust God, knowing that He is in control, even over the demonic forces around us.

This midweek study will explore the doctrine of guilt and shame and how that relates to our sin and forgiveness. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Guilt and Shame

Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed, as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10). Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense, and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.

Scripture: *Genesis 3:10; Psalm 25:16-18; Matthew 5:21-22; James 2:10*

1 Guilt is the status of being found guilty (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10).

Guilt is a fact, not a feeling or emotion. It is something provable. Whether we feel shame or not, our guilty status cannot be changed based on emotion. As humans, whether or not we feel shame over our actions, we are guilty of breaking God's law.

2 Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions (Gen. 3:10).

Whether we admit it or not, shame is useful. Shame indicates that we have a proper understanding of right and wrong. When we are shameful over the things God wants us to be shameful over, it can lead us to repentance. While there is unhealthy shame God doesn't desire us to feel, the shame God wants us to have is for our good and is removed by the shed blood of Christ when we repent of our sin.

3 Scripture teaches we are guilty and feel shame due to sin (Ps. 25:16-18).

As sinners, we are legally guilty, and should be shameful over sin. The good news is that both have been victoriously dealt with by Christ on the cross. When we are guilty and feel shame believers should run to Christ who is faithful and just to forgive our sin.

Opening Activity

Ask students to give accurate definitions (without looking them up on their own) for words such as sunburn, gash, broken heart, embarrassment, and so on. Ask them to share the definitions and whether they've experienced those things. Next, ask them whether they'd feel more comfortable giving definitions of those words or experiencing those words first hand. Obviously, the experience is worse than simply describing it. You can also do this with happy words as well. Students would rather experience happy feelings than to describe them.

Explain that there is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is the cold, hard definition of your wrongdoing, shame is the experience that accompanies your guilt. Tell students we will look at the topics of guilt and shame and how they relate to our Christian faith.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Grace Wins" by Matthew West
(*Live Forever*, Sparrow Records, 2015)
- ▶ "Love's Not Done With You" by Jason Gray
(*Love Will Have the Final Word*, Centricity Music, 2014)
- ▶ "Restore Me" by Kutless
(*Glory [Deluxe Edition]*, BEC Recordings, 2014)
- ▶ "Lay It Down" by Sanctus Real
(*The Dream*, Sparrow Records, 2014)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Trash" *Skitguys.com*
- ▶ "Love Anthem" *Skitguys.com*

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1 Guilt is the status of being found guilty (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10).

Guilt is not emotional, it is just the raw result of our behavior. While our guilt is sure, it is not the last word if you are in Christ.

- ▶ *In what ways are you guilty, regardless of how you feel about your actions?*

Read Matthew 5:21-22.

- ▶ *What do these verses say about guilt?*

You don't have to feel guilty to actually be guilty. Think of it this way: You don't have to feel late to be late for an event. Guilt is your status, not an emotion.

- ▶ *In what ways have you been guilty, but not felt that way? What might this say about your heart?*

Read James 2:10.

This passage says nothing about emotions or feelings. In fact, this passage is all about the true, provable status of being guilty. This verse goes as far as to say if you've broken one law, you have failed to keep the entirety of the law.

- ▶ *How does being guilty, whether you feel that way or not, affect how you think about sin?*

2 Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions (Gen. 3:10).

Option: Show X-Rays of broken bones that have come from injuries such as skateboarding, snowboarding, football, gymnastics, and so on.

Explain that certain actions result in real pain. Even though the action and pain are two separate things, they are naturally connected. The real pain is a result of the real action that was taken. Shame is the pain—the feeling incurred from the action of sin. Explain that similar to the pain alerting you to the bone break, shame alerts believers to a break in our pursuit of holiness in Christ.

Read Genesis 3:10.

- ▶ *How did Adam react to his shame after he sinned in the garden?*
- ▶ *How did Adam's relationship with God change after he sinned? How did Adam realize the change?*

Just like Adam realized certain things about himself due to his sin and shame, we also realize we are sinners and run from God. However, like Adam, we find out that running from God in our shame isn't God's desire.

- ▶ *In what ways are you tempted to run from God when you feel shame over your sin?*

3 Scripture teaches we are guilty and feel shame due to sin (Ps. 25:16-18).

Read Psalm 25:16-18.

In this passage we see both the clear guilt of sin, as well as the shame that accompanies the status of being guilty. Instead of running from God, the psalmist cried out to God to forgive him of sin.

- ▶ *In what ways can we take our cues about both guilt and shame from the Psalmist?*
- ▶ *In what ways have you failed to listen to the voice of shame and run to your Heavenly Father over your sin?*
- ▶ *Why might guilt and shame have been put into our lives for our good as Christians?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *How has your thinking about guilt and shame changed due to this study?*
- ▶ *In what ways can you properly use both guilt and shame to your advantage in your walk with Christ?*

Challenge students to know guilt is an objective status devoid of emotion. Shame is the emotion that rightly accompanies guilt, and Scripture teaches we experience both simultaneously. However, even though we have both guilt and shame, Jesus died to take them away. He freed us from sin by His blood.

This midweek study will explore what life after death is like for believers. Use the following outline, activity, playlist, and video ideas to lead a midweek event for your students.

Essential Doctrine: Life After Death

The Bible teaches that when a Christian dies he or she immediately is with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8). This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11). For those who are not in Christ, life after death results in being separated from Christ in a state of suffering, even though future judgment remains (Luke 16:19-31).

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31; 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 6:10-11

1 When believers die, they are immediately with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8).

When a Christian dies, there isn't a half-way stop between earth and the Lord. The Scripture speaks very clearly that when we are "away from the body" we are with the Lord. At the moment of any Christian's death, they are in the presence of Christ.

2 The final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11).

While believers are with the Lord immediately upon death, there is a greater home for those who are in Christ at the future resurrection of the dead. Believers are with the Lord in both places and are conscious and aware of everything happening.

3 For those not in Christ, life after death is separation from Christ in a state of suffering (Luke 16:19-31).

While Christ's followers are with God at the moment of their death, those who are without Christ are separated from Christ in a state of suffering. The future judgment of hell is separation from God that is permanent, eternal, and is a state of suffering for all who rejected Christ on earth along with Lucifer and his demons.

Opening Activity

Discuss with students the TV/Movie series *StarTrek*. You could even show a few pictures of the cast and play the theme music. Recall to the students how in the opening sequence of any *StarTrek* film or TV show, the narrator would always say, "To boldly go where no one has gone before."¹ This is a famous line that inspires adventure and mystery of the unknown. Explain to students that Heaven is full of mystery because no one has ever died and come back to tell us exactly what Heaven is like or what the judgment before Christ looks like.

While there is a great mystery about "going where no one has returned from before," we do know certain things about what happens in our life after death. Tell students that today we will discuss what immediately happens after death for both believers and non-believers.

1. *Star Trek*, directed by J.J. Abrams (2009; Los Angeles, CA: Paramount, 2009), DVD.

Worship/Playlist Ideas

- ▶ "Revelation Song" by Kari Jobe
(*Kari Jobe*, Integrity Music, 2010)
- ▶ "Live It Well" by Switchfoot
(*Where the Light Shines Through [Deluxe Edition]*, Vanguard Records, 2016)
- ▶ "Free From It All" by Lecrae
(*Gravity*, Reach Records, 2014)
- ▶ "Glory to Glory" by Bethel Music
(*Have It All [Live]*, Bethel Music, 2016)

Video Idea(s)

- ▶ "Black Belt in Faith" *BluefishTV.com*
- ▶ "Evermore" *Skitguys.com*

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1 When believers die, they are immediately with the Lord (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8).

The Scriptures say that at the moment of a believer's death they are present with Christ. There isn't a place where believers must wait before access to heaven is granted. Heaven is immediate and believers are aware that they are there.

- ▶ *How does being with God immediately after death remove a certain level of anxiety about death?*

Read 2 Corinthians 5:8.

- ▶ *In what terms did Paul describe our dwelling with the Lord when we are away from the body? Why is that significant?*

Because we know we will be with God immediately after death, we are free to trust God in obedience on earth today.

- ▶ *What are some additional ways being present with the Lord immediately after death gives us courage in the present?*

Read Luke 23:43.

In this passage, Jesus assured the thief on the cross of being with Him in paradise immediately. Jesus said this, not as a possibility, but as a sure fact.

- ▶ *Why was Jesus able to assure the thief on the cross that he would immediately be in Heaven?*

2 The final state for believers takes place at the future resurrection (Rev. 6:10-11).

Option: Think of the best sports team possible (basketball, cheerleading, football, soccer, etc.). Ask students to list their favorite championship teams and to tell why these teams are the best in their eyes. Ask the students to imagine that their team has been ranked first throughout the entire season and is easily recognized as the best team. Even though they have an unchallenged ranking, the team doesn't fully earn its title until mid-season. When does that final crown come? Obviously, when they win the championship at the final game of the year.

While we are on the winning, number one ranked squad with Christ as our Coach, the final, ultimate and greatest resting place for us will be after the final resurrection and judgment. At this point believers will be at the final state with Christ.

Read Revelation 6:10-11.

- ▶ *In your own words describe what happened in this passage. How does it hint at our final state in Christ?*

- ▶ *At the final judgment and resurrection, what does this passage say Christ will accomplish?*

At this judgment and resurrection, Christ will judge the nations and set everything right. Sin and death will be abolished and those who have trusted Him will reign forever with Christ.

- ▶ *How does this realization affect the way you live your life now as a child of God?*

3 For those not in Christ, life after death is separation from Christ in a state of suffering (Luke 16:19-31).

Read Luke 16:19-31.

In this passage, we read a parable of a man who lived richly on Earth, but missed the kingdom of God. This passage describes the final condition of the individual who treasures earthly possession over Christ.

- ▶ *In what ways is this story applicable today? How does the truth of this story still ring true?*

Hell isn't an in-between place, or a time-out, designed to warn people to turn to Christ. Hell is permanent, and at the final judgment and resurrection, those who have rejected Christ will be sent there forever.

- ▶ *In what ways does the reality of hell wake you up to the urgency of the gospel message?*

WRAP IT UP

- ▶ *What ways can the knowledge of your life after death effect how you live today?*

Challenge students to know a believer is present with the Lord immediately after death, even though the final state for the believer occurs at the future resurrection.