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“God Wants Me to Be Happy”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: There are many versions of the lie “God wants me to be happy.” For example: “God wants me to be rich”; or “God wouldn’t want me to rush into marriage so I’ll live with my significant other”; or “God wouldn’t deny me these feelings I have for someone of the same sex”; and on and on. Usually the person saying this phrase is trying to justify a sin that God condemns. It sounds cruel to say, “God doesn’t want me to be happy!” Well then, what does God want for me?

Activity:

- Begin by watching a video about some churches that teach a version of this lie.
- Divide into groups of four or five. Pick someone in your group to read Genesis 3:15-19 aloud. Then discuss how you would respond to the people in the video clip using truths from Genesis 3. Below are some questions to consider as you craft a response.

Why is the thinking expressed in the video so appealing?

If you buy into this way of thinking, what is the foundation of your confidence for your life?

Agree/Disagree: There is profit in serving God.



In Genesis 3, what does God promise we will experience as a result of sin?

This too is a blessing. What would result if we don't experience the consequences of sin?

My Response:

What God Wants for Us

1. Read Mark 8:31-37. What does God want for us?

A _____.

- In Matthew 16:22, Peter expresses the natural reaction to suffering: "Never!" What did Peter want?

Like Peter, we may have our own ideas about what we would have planned for Jesus. We certainly have our own ideas about what we would like for ourselves.

The chart below shows some things that we might have wished for Jesus. Fill in the chart to show corresponding wishes that we might have for ourselves.

<i>For Jesus</i>	<i>For Us (His Followers)</i>
Jesus is crowned King on Palm Sunday.	
Everybody loves Jesus.	

His new church grows rapidly.	
No one ever contradicts or opposes him.	
Everybody wants to get closer to him.	

- Bearing the cross can be summarized in two words: “Deny self.” Why is that so hard?

The cross in a Christian’s life is not simply suffering, but it is suffering that comes as a result of being a Christian. Who of us has not thought, “If I only had _____, then I’d be happy”? (*Fill in the blank for yourself.*)

Actually, getting what we want leads to disappointment, or the joy lasts only a moment before the heart chases after another desire. Within your group, identify the root cause of disappointment and discontent. Give examples that demonstrate how it expresses itself in our lives.

2. Read Romans 7:14-25. What one word describes what life is for us (and what God wants for us)?

A _____.

- Think of Luther’s explanation to the First Commandment: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” What makes that so difficult for us Christians?
- The old self is at work most when the new self is trying to be strengthened. Explain how the old self is at work even when we are praying, listening to God’s Word, or giving an offering.

3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 together. What does God want for us?

He wants us to be _____.

- You could write your own autobiography with 2 Corinthians 12:9 as the title. List ways that God has proven this to you in your life or how he has used the crosses of life to drive you back to his own cross. Share with your group.

- King David (2 Samuel 11) is a good example for us. What happens when all things are going well and there is no apparent cross in one's life? Now, describe life for David with the cross (much as a result of his own doing).

4. In 1 Timothy 2:3,4 we read: "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." What does God want for us?

To be _____.

5. John 20:31 says, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." What is the main purpose of the Bible?

Group Discussion

- Think of a scenario in which someone has said to you, "But God just wants me to be

happy.” (A hypothetical situation is fine as well!) With your group, develop a biblical response to that person.

- **Good Quote:** “He doesn’t ask you to take a pilgrimage to Mecca. He doesn’t ask you to wash in the Ganges. He doesn’t ask you to walk on burning coals, or burn incense, or ring bells, or enter a monastery. What he asks is much harder. He asks and insists on it: Deny yourself, and take up the cross and follow me. He asks and he insists on it: Be a Christian!” (Daniel Deutschlander, *Don’t Be Afraid! Cheer Up! It’s the Cross!* Part 1, p. 6). In what ways is being a Christian much harder than the items listed?

Closing Activity

Take three minutes to write a haiku illustrating the blessings of the Christian cross in our lives or in response to the lie “God just wants me to be happy.” (*Haikus are three-line poems with the syllable structure of 5-7-5.*)



“There Are Many Ways Into God’s Presence”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: When it comes to truth, like mathematics, there is only one way to be right but many ways to be wrong. Or to quote G. K. Chesterton (*Orthodoxy*): “There are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands.” The Bible tells us that Jesus is the only way to heaven, but that viewpoint isn’t popular in today’s society. More and more people (including some Christians) have fallen for the lie “There are many ways into God’s presence.” In this lesson, we will evaluate that claim based on what God tells us in his Word.

Activity:

- Former night talk show host Jay Leno often went out onto the street and asked people random questions. He called the segment “Jaywalking.” Imagine that you are stepping out onto the streets and asking a cross-section of Americans, “Describe God and who he is to you.” With your group, list at least five things people might say.

- Can all of these responses describe the same God? Explain your answer.



More Than One Way?

1. God is holy and unapproachable.

- Read Isaiah 6:1-5. What effect did seeing God in all his holiness have on Isaiah?
- Why did it have this effect?
- Often in the Old Testament, we see a similar reaction to being in the presence of holiness. People were terrified! In the New Testament church today, why are we less likely to react that way?
- What is missing from that picture?

2. We are not good enough to approach a holy God.

- Moses wanted to see God's glory. This was God's response: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). God explained the reason for this: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, emphasis added). What misunderstandings does someone harbor who believes that God will accept him or her for being a good person?
- In Romans 6:23 we read, "The wages of sin is death." How would you explain to someone why even one sin merits death?
- "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). At your table, discuss whether or not even a Christian can do a truly good work. (*See Matthew 25:35-40; 1 John 1:7.*)

3. We need a mediator in order to approach a holy God.

- Genesis 3:15 says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Put the wall of enmity where it belongs in the illustration below:

Pre-sin

Devil Adam and Eve God

Post-sin

Devil Adam and Eve God

- Read Leviticus 16:2. Except for the high priest on the Day of Atonement, no one could come into the Most Holy Place, or he would die. In the space below, label or draw the Holy Place, Most Holy Place, and the ark of the covenant.

- Matthew 27:51—“At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.” Each group: take one or more of the following passages—Hebrews 7:26; 10:11-14; 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 5:1,2. Read the passage and explain the significance of what happened on Good Friday.

4. Jesus is the only way to a holy God.

- Read Acts 4:12 and John 14:6. Respond to someone who says, “Christianity is too exclusive. *No one can claim to have the truth exclusively*” (emphasis added).

Group Discussion

- Agree/Disagree: If there are many ways into God's presence, then the God of the Bible is a fool.

- The message of liberalism says, "A God without wrath sent the Christ without a cross to a world without sin." If this were true, who is going to heaven and how will they get there?

- What are the differences between Christianity and every other world religion?

- On the basis of our study, how would you now respond to the statement: "There are many paths into God's presence"?

Closing Activity

Take two minutes to come up with a bumper sticker slogan illustrating that Jesus is the only way to God.



“God Has Grown Softer on Sin”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: Some people have a caricature of God in their minds. They see him as all law and fury in the Old Testament but all gospel and fuzzies in the New Testament. People believe that God has grown softer on sin. If this lie stands, it could destroy souls. This lesson will seek to debunk this lie and give us an answer to those who believe it.

Activity:

Question & Answer. You’ve been asked to write for the “Question and Answer” section of your church’s website. You receive the question below. How would you answer? *(The following passages may help.)*

The God of the Old Testament wiped out the world with a flood, sent plagues on the Egyptians, and commanded his people to kill the Canaanites. He created a world full of people but only revealed himself to one group and condemned the rest because they were born in the wrong place. In the New Testament, we are told that God is a God of love, that his followers were to go into all the world and tell of his love and that we are to follow Jesus’ example of turning the other cheek. How can anyone believe that the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament?

From the Old Testament:

Exodus 9:14,16

The books of Job and Jonah



1 Kings 8:41-43

Ezekiel 33:11

From the New Testament:

Matthew 28:19,20

Think about Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

Acts 12:21-23

2 Peter 3:9

Revelation 19:11-16

Your Response:

Consistently Consistent!

Explain how the Bible passages support the following statements:

1. God does not change.

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

“It is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ ” (1 Peter 1:16, quoting Leviticus 19:2).

- What are some reasons people believe or want to believe the lie that God has grown softer on sin?

2. The silence of God is not indifference.

“Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Romans 2:5).

- Believing that God is soft on sin is soul-destroying! God does not mince words here. What would you say to a friend who is worried about these words because she keeps falling into her pet sin?

3. God is not soft on sin; he is serious about salvation. How do the following passages help us see that?

Hebrews 10:26-31

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

- Your niece is living with her boyfriend, and you try to correct her with God’s truth. However, she says, “I know it’s wrong, but God will forgive me anyway—I know what Jesus did for me!” What major misunderstandings does she have? What truths does she need to hear?

Group Discussion

- Some have likened the way God dealt with people differently in the Old and New Testaments to parenting. If your child stole something at age 5, 15, and 25, your punishment would be different for each age but your attitude toward the sin remains the same. Is this a good analogy? Why or why not?

- Exodus 34:6,7 is God’s explanation of who he is. After reading the passage, pick out three attributes of God. Then come up with at least one example of each from the Old and New Testaments where God demonstrated that particular attribute.

- Think of the sermons we hear in church: the pastor will preach the law and show us how we fall short, then he will preach the gospel and show us we are forgiven

in Jesus. We know the message we will hear—and that’s good! However, is there a danger that we might start to believe the lie that God has grown softer on sin?

Closing Activity

Tweet That! Answer someone who says, “God has grown softer on sin,” in 140 characters or less! #UnchangingGod



“God Helps Those Who Help Themselves”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: Where did this lie come from? Is it in the Bible? No, but you will find a form of it in the Koran: “Indeed, Allah will not change the conditions of a population until they change what is in themselves” (Ar-Ra’d 13:11). This lie about God has its roots in pagan religion. Five hundred years before Christ, Aesop wrote, “The gods help them that help themselves.” Our current wording was used by the deist Ben Franklin, who said in *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, “God helps those who help themselves.” Satan often couches his lies in half-truths. Today, we seek to expose this lie and to give an answer for the hope that we have!

Activity:

Amen, Brother! On the internet, it is possible to find many examples of messages that reflect what we often call “prosperity theology,” a theology based on the premise that God wants us to be successful and rich. And we will be, the message proclaims, if we only do our part. A common theme expressed in these messages is that *your determination* and *your positive thinking* will produce good things in your life.

- In your opinion, why do people want to believe this lie?
- Often, an element of truth is contained in lies about God. Perhaps that is one thing that makes them so appealing. Read the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) and 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Identify an element of truth in the lie “God helps those who help themselves.”



Where Does My Help Come From?

1. My sinful nature leads me to believe that I can do something to be right with God. This is called the *opinio legis*, which means “the opinion of the law.” Give specific examples of how you see this truth in other religions, denominations, and even in your own hearts.

2. The Bible makes it clear that by nature I am dead and blind. Point out how the following passages refute the *opinio legis*.

Ephesians 2:1—“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

Acts 26:17,18—“I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

3. God must do 100% of the helping to make us alive. Read the following passage. Paul compares our conversion to God’s work at creation. In what way is God’s activity in creation like conversion? (*Hint: Answer the question “Why did Lazarus come out of the tomb?”*)

2 Corinthians 4:6—“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”

4. The following passages underscore the truth that God helps *only* those who *can’t* help themselves!

Read Luke 18:9-14. In what ways do we sometimes behave like the Pharisee?

Romans 4:4,5—“Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.” Why is righteousness credited to us as a gift?

Romans 5:8 (emphasis added)—“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners*, Christ died for us.” What advice would you give to someone who says, “If I can just kick this habit (or sin), I’ll feel closer to God”?

5. Made alive in Christ, we will live for him.

Read Titus 2:11-14. What fuels our desire to obey God’s Word?

Group Discussion

- In Acts 14:22 we read, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” The truth is, even if we are living faithfully, God does not always help in a worldly sense. Using your Bible knowledge, give an example of someone for whom this was true. (*Think prophets, apostles, patriarchs, and even your own life.*)
- In his explanation to the conclusion of the commandments, Martin Luther said, “God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear his anger and not disobey what he commands. But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should love and trust in him and gladly obey what he commands.” Is Luther saying, “God helps those who help themselves”? Explain. (*For help, look up Matthew 5:3-10; Luke 17:10; and Romans 11:35.*)

- Describe what life will be like for those who believe “God helps those who help themselves.”

Closing Activity

Pen a Proverb. Write a two-line proverb expressing a truth that exposes the lie “God helps those who help themselves.” Then look up Proverbs 28:26 to see how your wisdom compares to that of the holy writer!



“God Has Made Death a Natural Part of Life”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: This lie about God is an interesting one. A person can understand why someone might want to believe it. If death is a natural part of life, then we should embrace it rather than run from it. However, this contradicts the human experience. The vast majority of people want to live and will go to every length and expense to eke out a few more moments here on this earth. In *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, the character named Yoda said, “Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those around you who transform into the Force. Mourn them do not. Miss them do not.” In other words, “Get over it!” This lie is a coping mechanism for death. As always, we will see that the Bible has a far better answer for death!

Activity:

May I Read You a Story? *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* is a children’s book that you can get from the library or listen to on the internet. As you read/listen to the story, jot down the answer to this question: What are the messages this book wants to teach about death?

Death Is Natural?

1. Death is separation. What kind of death (separation) does each verse describe?

Physical—“The dust [the body] returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit [soul] returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).



Spiritual—“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1).

Eternal—“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ ” (Matthew 25:41).

- Evaluate the statement: “This life is hell!”

2. Why death?

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people . . .” (Romans 5:12).

“The LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever’ ” (Genesis 3:22).

- For what reasons is the lie “God has made death a natural part of life” so dangerous?

- What is God’s plan for death?

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-22,55-58. Respond to someone who says, “You don’t need to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus.” *(Be sure to explain the comfort you have because Jesus is risen indeed!)*

3. What happens when I die?

“The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”
(Ecclesiastes 12:7).

“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment . . .”
(Hebrews 9:27).

“Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise’ ”
(Luke 23:43).

Look up John 5:24-29. (*Note the believer’s two resurrections.*)

4. Think of at least two belief systems regarding death that stem from this lie.

5. How would belief in this lie affect a person’s outlook on life?

6. What will eternal life be like?

“Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”
(Philippians 3:21).

Read Revelation 21:3,4. Agree/Disagree: The Christian doesn’t fear death.

Group Discussion

- Below are common questions about heaven. Discuss what we know and what we do not know.

Will we recognize people we knew on earth?

What will our relationship with our loved ones be like?

Will we be sad if a loved one is not there?

Are there degrees of glory?

Will we know what is happening on earth?

- Agree/Disagree: God's promise of sending Jesus was his plan B because of sin.

- A pastor once told about a hospital visit to a member of the congregation who had delivered a stillborn baby. The hospital chaplain called him over to give him advice on what to say. He advised, "Simply explain to the mother that this is the natural course of things in nature. You see it with cows and pigs all the time. It's simply part

of the cycle of life.” If the pastor had followed that advice, how might the mother have reacted? Think of at least two possibilities.

- Why did the chaplain feel this was the best advice to give?
- Think back to Freddie the Leaf from the opening activity. How would you answer someone who states, “God has made death a natural part of life”?

Closing Activity

Jerusalem the Golden. We end today with the singing of “Jerusalem the Golden.” Imagine: here we are, standing with John on the portal of heaven looking at what awaits. As we sing, let’s thank God for his coming blessing.



“A God of Love Wouldn’t Send People to Hell”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: The logic goes this way: If God is loving, then the concept of eternal suffering for temporal sin is incompatible with his character. That would make God a monstrous God. It *seems* logical, but it is not biblical. Nor is it truly logical, as we shall see. Today, we will explore the dangerous ramifications of this lie and provide a biblical rationale to use as an answer when someone states this lie.

Activity:

The error of universalism says that the biblical teaching of eternal damnation is incompatible with the concept of a loving God. Proponents believe that God will eventually destroy all sin and save all people. A universalist would be very comfortable saying, “We all worship the same God by different names. We are all going to the same place! Hell as a place of eternal suffering does not exist.” Read the Scriptures listed in the passage bank. What misunderstandings about the Christian faith do universalists have?

Passage Bank: John 14:6; Exodus 34:6,7; Acts 4:12; Galatians 5:4; 2 Peter 1:21; John 17:17



No Hell?

1. How does the Bible describe hell?

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

- Recall the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-34). For how long was the servant thrown into jail?

“They will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind” (Isaiah 66:24).

“Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

- Your friend asks you, “If hell is real, then where is it?” How would you answer?

2. Why will some go to hell?

Read Matthew 25:41-43.

Revelation 14:10,11—“They, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who

worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.”

- How is the concept of “no hell and everyone goes to heaven” illogical?

3. How is the concept of “no hell” actually unfair?

Hebrews 10:30—“For we know him who said, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ and again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ ”

Isaiah 61:8—“For I, the LORD, love justice: I hate robbery and wrongdoing.”

- Think about it! If there were no hell, what would be the practical implications for your life? (i.e., how would your life and attitude change?)

4. How can we say that hell is evidence of God’s love for us?

Matthew 27:46—“About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’).”

2 Corinthians 5:14,15—“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

- In the sphere of the world, how do authority figures (police officers, those in the military, etc.) get people to obey them?
- What is it about God that motivates us to serve and obey him?

Group Discussion

- Explain how the following passages point to the truth that there will be degrees of torment in hell.

Luke 12:47,48

Matthew 11:20-24

- Why don't people want to believe that God would send people to hell? List as many reasons as you can and then evaluate those reasons.
- Evangelical Christian author Rob Bell wrote in his book *Love Wins*: "Has God created millions of people over tens of thousands of years who are going to spend eternity in anguish? Can God do this, or even allow this, and still claim to be a loving God? Does God punish people for thousands of years with infinite, eternal torment for things they did in their few finite years of life?" (p. 88). In your estimation, what does he believe about hell, and what would you say to him?

Closing Activity

Children's Sermon. How would you explain to kindergartners the truth that a loving God can, does, and will send people to hell? Write a children's sermon on that theme.



“It Doesn’t Matter How God Made the World”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: The Darwinian theory of evolution popularized the idea that God did not create the world. Despite the hundreds of references to creation in the Bible, even Christians have questioned whether it’s necessary to believe that God created the world in six 24-hour days. However, if one were to take this line of thinking to its theological conclusion, the veracity of all of Scripture would be in doubt. So does it matter? This lesson will help us answer with a definitive “Yes!”

Activity:

Devil’s Advocate. In your groups, choose a reader (looks up and reads the passages), a leader (makes sure discussion moves forward), a devil’s advocate (takes the position outlined on the next page), and an answer person (answers the devil’s advocate with a biblical perspective).

- To begin, read the following passages as a group and comment on what they say about whether it matters if God made the world as the record in Genesis indicates.

2 Timothy 3:16,17

John 17:17

Romans 1:20



Colossians 1:16,17

Luke 1:37

Romans 8:19-23

John 5:39

- Also with your group, consider what evolution leads a person to believe about the following:

Humankind's status

The method of creation

Humankind's purpose and responsibility

Sin and original sin

Death

Jesus

- Now have the person answering and the devil’s advocate discuss the subject (the rest of the group should help the person answering).

Devil’s advocate, start the conversation with the following quote:

“You believe in creation, I believe in evolution. We can agree to disagree. I still believe in Jesus! What does it matter how God created the world?”

How might the answerer respond?

Creation Matters

1. As someone reads Genesis 1:1–2:3 out loud, pick out phrases that argue against evolution.

2. How do you know there is a Creator?

Hebrews 3:4—“For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything.”

Good Quote: “The universe is not merely more complicated than we can understand. It’s more complicated than we can imagine” (Albert Einstein).

- Evaluate the following philosophical arguments for the existence of God as creator.

Ontological—Since we can conceive of a supreme being, he must exist. It's the thinking behind René Descartes' famous quote, "I think, therefore I am."

Historical—Since all nations believe in a supreme being, he must exist.

Cosmological—Since the world exists, there must be a creator. Since everything has a cause, there must be a prime cause.

Teleological—Nature has a design, therefore there must be a designer.

Moral—Since people have morals, there must be a supreme author of morality.

- What is the goal in the use of these arguments?

3. How did God create the world and why do we believe it?

2 Corinthians 4:6—“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”

Hebrews 11:3—“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

Read Matthew 19:4-6.

- 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, “We live by faith, not by sight.” That faith is created not by what we see but by what God says through his Word. Let’s try a little theological speculation! Why do you suppose God created Adam and Eve on day six? (On what day would you have created them if you were God?)

Group Discussion

- Agree/Disagree: We should use science to refute the theory of evolution.
- The resurrection of Jesus is the lynchpin of Christianity! We believe it because the Bible proclaims it. But how would you answer the skeptic who asked, “How do you know the gospel writers were telling the truth?”

- How does the reality of the resurrection help in answering someone who says, “It doesn’t matter how God made the world”?
- Theistic evolutionists claim that God created the world using evolution and that the days in the Genesis account are actually billions of years. Defend the 24-hour day of Genesis and point out the problems with trying to combine creation and the theory of evolution.

Closing Activity

College Classroom. Imagine you are a student attending a secular university. The professor asks for a show of hands of those who still believe in creation. You raise your hand and he says to you, “Why would you believe that?!” You have enough time for two sentences before he cuts you off. What would those two sentences be?



“God Is Distant and Disinterested in What Happens”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: Deism is the view that God created the world but then removed himself from its operation, like a clockmaker who creates the clock but then lets it run on its own. In other words, deists believe God is not directly involved in this world, but deists aren't the only ones who think this way. Because of the suffering that exists, many people—and at times this even applies to us—think that God is distant and disinterested. They think he doesn't really care about the evil that exists. So, does God care? The goal of this lesson is to show not only that God does care for this world but that he is deeply interested in each one of us.

Activity:

Interview Time! You work for a magazine and you just found out that you are going to get to interview God. You are allowed to ask five questions. As a group, ask God what your readers want to know about the presence of evil and suffering in this world. Then brainstorm what you think his answers will be. When you are done, exchange questions with another group. Pick out their best question and answer it. To help you as you brainstorm your questions and answers, you might look at this passage bank: Genesis 20:6; 50:20; Exodus 14:19-20; Psalm 5:4-6; Matthew 10:29; Acts 17:28; 2 Thessalonians 1:6.



Providential Points

1. Take one minute to think of one or two passages or truths from the Bible that demonstrate how God is interested with what happens in the world. After one minute, share your thoughts with your group.

2. The fact that God cares for his creation is called his providence. There are three facets of God's providence.

Psalm 145:15—"The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time."

- _____ :

Acts 17:28—"For in him we live and move and have our being."

Colossians 1:17—"In [Jesus] all things hold together."

- _____ :

Jeremiah 10:23—"LORD, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps."

- _____ :

Think about it! What are the implications of this final passage for the plans you make for your life?

3. As you read the following passages, identify why it may *seem to some* that Jesus is not interested in the world.

Romans 8:18-25

2 Peter 3:9—“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Matthew 24:3-14

- In what ways do these passages demonstrate that Jesus is interested in what happens in the world? Take one minute to develop a list of one to three things, then share with your group.

4. Jesus is the greatest evidence that God is not distant nor disinterested!

John 3:16—“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”

Isaiah 53:5,6,10—“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. . . . Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”

Ephesians 1:22—“God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.”

- How do these truths impact how you view the world?

Group Discussion

- How might a skeptic respond to the following arguments that God cares for the world?

“God sends rain and gives sunlight and makes crops grow so we can eat.”

“People care about each other and reflect God’s love.”

“God gives life to everything—childbirth and in nature.”

- Some say, “If only God would appear and show us that he is in control, then we’d recognize that he cares!” Remember, he did that in Jesus and most people rejected him. As we have seen, God does care about what happens in the world, but he does wear *masks*. He often works through the people or institutions he places in our lives. He places these entities in our lives precisely because he does care. Below are examples. Explain at least two blessings God gives us through each of these as he governs this world.

Home (e.g., parents, caregivers)

Government

Church

Fellow Christians

- God carefully created Adam and Eve. He knit us together in our mother’s wombs. God promised a Savior and carefully governed all of world history to bring Jesus

into this world to die for our sins. God promised never again to destroy the world with a flood but instead promised that seasons and day and night will never cease. Does this sound like a God who is not interested in our lives? No! A coworker says, “God seems like he’s a million miles away right now—he doesn’t care about what I’m going through!” Read the passages to help you formulate an answer. (Matthew 6:25-34; John 14:1,2; Romans 5:3-5; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 4:15; Revelation 21:4)

Closing Activity

Dealer’s Choice. Write a simple poem or create an original stanza to a familiar hymn tune about God’s interest and care for this world.



“I Don’t Need the Bible or Worship to Have a Relationship With God”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: You often hear people talk about having a personal relationship with Jesus. However, though individuals have personal faith, the Bible speaks of our life with Jesus as communal. Christianity is about the church’s relationship with Christ. Just add up all the “one another” passages in the New Testament! We are baptized into the body of Christ. So when we address having a relationship with God, we need also to address our relationship with God’s people.

Activity:

In Another World. Imagine you live in a world exactly like our own but with one exception: the Bible doesn’t exist. Armed only with the natural knowledge of God, discuss what you could know about the following questions in such a world.

- How does God view me?
- What do I know about God?
- How do I get closer to God?



- What does God want me to do with my life?

- How do I get to heaven?

God's Word and God's People

1. The natural knowledge of God is not enough to give a person a relationship with God. As you read the following passages, identify what we learn from the natural knowledge of God.

Psalm 19:1—"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

Romans 1:20—"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

Matthew 5:45—"He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

Romans 2:14,15—"Indeed when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them."

Acts 17:27—“God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.”

2. Agree/Disagree: All people know that God exists.

3. To have a relationship with God, a person needs the Bible! God says, “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (Galatians 3:26). God brings us into that relationship through faith! God works faith through the Bible. God says, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17). In fact, God’s Word is our life! “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Jesus said, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We remain in Jesus when we listen to his Word!

Read Hebrews 1:1,2.

- Imagine if your spouse or boyfriend/girlfriend only talked to you once a week, or month, or year. What would that do to you emotionally? How does that relate to the topic of reading the Bible?

Read Psalm 1:1-3.

- What does *meditate* mean?
- In metaphorical terms, this Scripture describes the benefits of daily reading the Bible. Explain the metaphors. What is meant by “yields its fruit in season” and “whose leaf does not wither”?

- List what you feel are the keys for a healthy relationship. How does believing this lie line up with fulfilling those keys?

- Read Hebrews 3:12-14. What do each of these terms or phrases teach us about reading the Bible or worshiping together?

“... daily”

“... so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness”

“... hold ... firmly”

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:3 and Romans 1:16. Come up with an analogy that will help answer this lie.

Closing Activity

Tabloid Headline. You are writing a headline to explain the blessings or need of God’s Word and worship.



“God Doesn’t Judge Anyone, and Neither Should You”

Prayer

Introductory Activity

Focus: Our world promotes the idea of tolerance. In fact, the only sin is to say that someone else is wrong! *Tolerance* is the concept that truth is determined by each person, not by the moral absolutes of God. The reason this lie is so appealing is that people want to have freedom to do anything they want. They don’t want you or their conscience getting in the way. In this lesson, we will explore what God’s Word says about judging.

Activity:

Devil’s Advocate. In your groups pick two readers (to look up and read the passages), a leader (to make sure the discussion moves forward), a devil’s advocate (to take the position outlined below), and an answer person (to answer the devil’s advocate with a biblical response).

Read the following passages as a group and comment on what they say about judging.

Matthew 7:2,15,16,21-24

John 7:24

Romans 2:1



Galatians 6:1

Ephesians 4:15

2 Timothy 2:25;3:16

Now the answerer and the devil's advocate will discuss these issues. Devil's advocate: Start the conversation with the quote below.

- “You are just like the Pharisees—always judging! Who are you to tell me that my church isn't right or that what I'm doing is wrong? Don't you know that Jesus said, 'Don't judge!' ”?

Judge for Yourself

1. God does judge. What do the following passages say about judgment?

Psalm 9:8—“He rules the world in righteousness and judges the peoples with equity.”

John 12:47,48—“If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.”

Acts 17:31—“For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

- Think about it! What false ideas do people hold who think God does not judge?
2. God tells us to make judgments out of love.

James 5:19,20—“My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”

 - What is at stake if one does not judge?
 3. Read Matthew 18:15-22. How does this portion of Scripture demonstrate that God’s delight is not catching people in their sins but forgiving them?
 4. Jesus tells us to warn someone of their sin in progressive steps. Why? If Jesus expects that the admonishment by the entire church might have the greatest impact, why not just start with that?
 5. How did Jesus treat pagans and tax collectors? How does that shape the way you treat someone who has not repented of a sin?
 6. But what about Jesus’ opening words in Matthew 7, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged”?
 - Read Matthew 7:1-5. Take 30 seconds on your own to think about what Jesus is actually saying about judgment in these verses. Write down your answer and share your thoughts with your group.

Group Discussion

- Respond to the following people:

“That church kicked me out!”

“Haven’t you ever heard of ‘Love your neighbor as yourself?’ ”

“This is my life! I don’t poke my nose into your life and judge you!”

“Who are you to judge two men who love each other? We are all sinners anyway.”

- List some instances when judging is inappropriate.

- Of the many things to keep in mind when witnessing to someone who says, “Don’t judge,” what, in your opinion, is the most important? Explain.

- People who hold to this lie envision a utopia in the church and unity in diversity of opinion in society. How would (does) this concept of “no judging” play out practically in the church and our world?

Closing Activity

Making Metaphors and Synthesizing Similes. Come up with an original metaphor or simile for the concept of failing to make judgments. “Failure to judge is (like) . . .