

elements
essentials

Overview

WEEK 0: SET UP

WEEK 1: WHAT IS SALVATION?

WEEK 2: WHO IS JESUS?

WEEK 3: WHY THE BIBLE?

WEEK 4: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

WEEK 6: WHAT IS GOD?

WEEK 7: HUMANITY AND THE NEED FOR A CENTERED SET

WEEK 8: *OPTIONAL BONUS* WHY HISTORY MATTERS IN ISSUES OF THEOLOGY (VIDEO)

Group Dynamics

At E3, we use groups as the primary vehicle for growing closer to Jesus. Why? Because through them, we get to engage in dialogue, share authentically, and put into practice both giving and receiving grace. As such, though small groups can be a little scary at first, over time they have a unique power to bond us together as Christians.

Before moving forward, it's important to acknowledge that all small groups need some healthy ground rules or guardrails to succeed.

First, we agree to embody and embrace E3's values as a group:

GRACE (be nice, don't assume, don't judge)

GROWTH (we all have areas we need to grow and mature in)

TRUST (what I share and hear won't leave this group or be used against me)

DIVERSITY (embracing differences, though challenging, is ultimately a strength)

HUMILITY (we are all equal and secondary to Jesus!)

Second, we commit to meeting regularly and not to miss meetings due to non-emergency matters.

Beyond this, we recommend that your group come up with your own agreements together! This can include bringing food, providing childcare, engaging socially, etc. You can list any additional agreements that you work out together below:

Group Dynamics

Each group should have a facilitator. These person(s) are not a spiritual authority, nor should they dominate or impose themselves upon the group. Instead, they are to be viewed as servants who help hold the group together. Their primary role should be to organize group meetings and facilitate group conversations. This may include following up with members who miss meetings, collecting and sharing pertinent information amongst group members, and communicating with church staff when necessary.

Finally, after discussing it together, determine and write down the meeting time, place, and dates for your weekly meetings below, including drinks and snacks (ex. Mondays at 7pm in the youth room).

Sign your name below, symbolizing your commitment to the next weeks.
I agree to meet through this curriculum with these people:

Tech

ALL the videos are located here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhG_BU6g4rE&list=PLSppwErqaFI4

OR go to element3.org and click on Essentials page!

Salvation

Begin your discussion by reflecting on what the term salvation means to you.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “salvation”? What were you taught that salvation meant when you were growing up or when you first came to faith? How has your understanding of it changed over time?

Everyone understands that brokenness is a part of our reality. We all recognize that some things are simply not right in our world and our own lives or relationships. Sometimes, we recognize that this brokenness is created by sin or poor choices. At other times, it seems to simply be caused by chaos.

What role does sin play in this experience of brokenness? What about chaos? Why do we ultimately need salvation from both?

How does understanding salvation as God rescuing and bringing us back into the right relationship with Him shape the way you understand God's character? How about His desire for us? What makes Jesus' life, death, and resurrection essential to this rescue?

Why do you think salvation is something we must receive rather than something we can accomplish on our own or earn? What does it mean to trust that salvation is a gift from God?

Salvation is too often understood as solely being about what happens to us after we die. However, this fails to recognize the biblical vision of salvation, which understands it as offering us new life here and now.

What do you think it means to experience salvation in our everyday lives? How might viewing salvation as something we're called to experience now change the way we relate to God, others, and ourselves?

Though we can't earn salvation by doing good works, the New Testament authors understood that our lives should change and transform as a natural byproduct of growing in our relationship with Jesus.

Salvation

How has your life changed since coming to trust in Jesus for your rescue and salvation? How did that influence the way you see and act in the world? Where might God be calling you into deeper trust and transformation in this next season of your life?

Jesus

As was discussed in this week's video, one of the most essential beliefs of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ was both fully human and divine. With this in mind, begin by reflecting on how you see this play out in Jesus' story.

Where do you see Jesus' divinity on display in the stories we have about his birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection? How about his humanity? How do both reveal an essential part of who he is?

Next, read Philippians 2:1-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

*6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*

*7 rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature[of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

*8 And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

*9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus

. In this section of his letter to the 1st-century Church in Philippi, the Apostle Paul casts a beautiful image of how Christians are called to mirror Christ's nature in their lives and relationships. Paul then brings his description to a climactic conclusion with a beautiful hymn about Jesus' incarnation that covers verses 6 through 11.

What parts of Jesus' nature and character does Paul focus on within this hymn? What does this reveal about who Jesus is?

What role do humility and self-sacrifice play in Jesus' character and nature? Why does Paul associate both with victory? What does this reveal about who Jesus is and why he came?

How is this description of Jesus counter-cultural in our world today? How does it offer a different vision of power and victory than the one upheld by our world?

Together, this section of Philippians reveals that Jesus' character, choices, and nature should be the central models for whom we are called to become as human beings. Ultimately, believing that Jesus is who he claims to be should, in turn, transform us into people who better reflect his character, worldview, lifestyle, and nature in the world.

Do you have a story of being transformed by Jesus? Take a moment to share it with the group. If you need help, then consider this framework: Who was I before I encountered or started following Jesus? What happened that led me to encounter or start following Jesus? Who am I now after that encounter or having now followed Jesus?

Where might Jesus be calling you into greater discipleship in this next season of your life? How might that help you better reflect Paul's beautiful description in Philippians 2?

Bible

Begin your discussion by reflecting broadly on what the Bible means to you.

What were you originally taught about the Bible when you were growing up, first learned about it, or came to faith? What was it? What made it unique? What was its purpose?

What do you think about the Bible today? What role does it play in your life?

In this week's video, Pastor Mike laid out the concept of primarily understanding the Bible as a story. Specifically, a story that was written and compiled by human beings living within different contexts over the course of thousands of years. This, in turn, means that it contains both unity and diversity within it.

Do you tend to think of the Bible as being, above all else, a story? How is this different than reading it primarily as a book of doctrines, rules, or ethics? How does thinking about it as being primarily a story impact the way we read it, interact with it, find ourselves within it, and apply it to our lives?

Where do you see unity throughout the biblical story? What themes, ideas, or worldviews are consistent, universal, and ever-present across its story? What does this reveal about the nature of God, ourselves, and our world?

Where do you see diversity within the biblical story? What themes, ideas, or worldviews seem to be contextual or flexible across its story? What does this reveal about the nature of God, ourselves, and our world?

Bible

Why do we need both unity and diversity to fully embrace the story that the Bible is trying to invite us into? How does this help us better understand the Bible's purpose and role in our own lives? How should this reality shape us as we interact with its story as Christians?

Where do you need to reorient how you think about or interact with the Bible and its story in this next season? What practices could you embrace to help you start doing so?

As a group, determine which Bible book is the most:

Admired:

Confusing:

Intriguing:

Perhaps this might be the focus of the next study!

Holy Spirit

Begin your discussion by taking time to reflect on your experience with the Holy Spirit.

When you first became a Christian, how were you taught to think about the Holy Spirit? Was it over- or under-emphasized in your experience?

How have your thoughts on this person of the Trinity changed over the course of your life?

In this week's video, Pastor Mike broadly explored the multifaceted depictions of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. In particular, he focused on how the word spirit (or, in Hebrew, ruahk and, in Greek, pneuma) can be used to describe many different forces that revolve around energy or animating life (see: breath, wind, etc.); as well as God's own, personal presence, which is eternally at work creating, animating, and sustaining all life in Creation.

How does this help us understand the role and purpose of the Holy Spirit in the world? What does it reveal about the way that the Holy Spirit interacts with us?

As mentioned, one of the most common tasks of the Holy Spirit in Scripture is to empower God's People to take part in His creative and redemptive work in the world. We see this in play with Joseph and Moses' leadership, the creation of God's Tabernacle and Temple, the Prophets, and more. At E3, we believe that this remains true today as the Holy Spirit continues to operate in and through us today as part of God's work of new creation.

How did the Holy Spirit work in Jesus' story? How can this help us understand the way the Spirit operates in our lives today?

Holy Spirit

Can you identify any positive gifts, skills, abilities, or achievements from your life that you'd attribute to a power greater than yourself working through you? Can you identify any experiences of transformation that weren't brought about via your own effort or willpower? How might what you've identified be an expression of God's Spirit working in and through you?

In this season, where do you still need to experience new creation in your character, behaviors, worldview, attitudes, or relationships? How could you rely on the Holy Spirit, instead of your own willpower, to experience that transformation? What practices or steps would you need to take in order to foster such dependence in this next season?

Close by praying over the areas of need and transformation you've identified in your discussion. Invite the Holy Spirit to work in and through each of you over this next season.

Good

In this week's video, we heard Scott, Mike, and Jadah discuss the Trinity; which is the longheld Christian belief that God eternally exists as three distinct, yet fully united, persons (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who share in the same divine substance or essence. Ultimately, the confession that the One true Creator God of the universe is triune or mysteriously three-in-one remains the most unique and fundamental belief of our faith.

However, despite this, the Trinity is also considered to be the most confusing part of Christian theology by most people. With this in mind, take a moment to discuss this essential with your group.

Does the concept of the Trinity confuse you? How do you understand it? How does it impact your understanding of God?

Two themes that were repeated throughout the video revolved around the fact that the Trinity requires us to embrace humility and a relational understanding of God.

Why is a posture of humility and willingness to accept mystery essential to embracing the concept of the Trinity? How does this invite us into a healthier understanding of and relationship with God?

What does it mean that God is fundamentally relational or defined by a unified, eternally self-sacrificial, loving relationship? What does this reveal about God's character, nature, and purposes?

Consider the many different areas throughout Scripture that Scott, Mike, and Jadah discussed where we see the Trinity being revealed.

Good

Which of these examples resonated with you the most? How does each help us better understand the nature of the Trinity?

Are there any Scriptures depicting the Trinity that you love but weren't mentioned? If so, which ones and why do they resonate with you?

Close by reflecting on the importance of the Trinity in the Christian life.

Why is it important that we hold onto and protect this essential truth at E3? What happens to our faith when we lose sight of this fundamental understanding of God?

What impact should the Trinity have on the way we think and live as Christians daily? Where do you see that taking root in your life and relationships? Where do you need to further reflect the Trinity in how you think and live in this next season?

Humanity and the Centered Set

One of the hardest theological tensions to navigate as a Christian revolves around whether or not human beings are inherently good or evil. Too often, Christians veer between extremes in their perspective, with many Western theologians landing on the side of inherent sin or the belief that humans are fundamentally wicked, evil, and without any positive attributes on their own.

What are some damaging consequences that might come with this type of thinking and teaching (intentional or not)? Alternatively, how might swinging too far the other way produce an unhealthy worldview as well?

Why is it important to recognize that all humans possess inherent goodness? How does this change the way we think about ourselves and God? How can we balance this positive perspective with a recognition that we are all also, simultaneously, flawed or broken too?

Critically, the New Testament teaches us that the Church, or community of Jesus' disciples, is where we should go to reconcile both sides of our humanity and, ultimately, let Jesus heal our brokenness. As such, the Church, at its best, is a hospital where sick people of all kinds come to get well.

Do you see the Church this way? Where have you seen the Church succeed at being like this? What attributes or characteristics allowed it to do so?

Sadly, the Church has often fallen short of this ideal vision by choosing to keep broken people out through the creation of bounded sets. In many ways, this is a primary reason that E3 has determined to live as a centered-set church instead.

How does this centered-set vision of church differ from those based upon creating bounded sets? What are some strengths of being a centered-set church? What struggles come with it?

Humanity and the Centered Set

One strength of the centered-set church model is that it helps us, as a community centered around Jesus, deal with divisive topics in healthier ways than we see modeled in our surrounding world. With this in mind, pick a topic that has often created division within the Church in your experience (communion, spiritual gifts, women in ministry, etc).

How do bounded-set churches deal with this issue? What results does that have on the church community and how it relates to those outside of its boundaries? How would a centered-set church deal with this same issue differently?

The last video is not essential but helpful in wrestling with the Centered Set. Feel free to engage--or not--with Church History and the pages that follow.

History (optional)

27-30 (ish)

70 . Destruction of the Jewish Temple and Jerusalem
by Roman armies

100-200 .

300's

400's.

476

1054

1000-1300

.

History

1500's and
1517

1611

1618

1700's

1800's

2026

History

Were there any areas from Church history that surprised or encouraged you? Did anything help you better understand your own, personal experiences with church? Does it highlight any past baggage with church that you might be bringing into your time at E3?

How should this broader understanding of Church history impact the way we view ourselves and our church community? How can it help us discern what it means to do church well, both in terms of mirroring positive examples from church history and avoiding negative ones?