

Good and Evil – Biology and Theology: Sinner or Saint?

SESSION FIVE LEADER GUIDE

This leader guide is designed to follow each page of the fifth session: “**GOOD AND EVIL – BIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: SINNER OR SAINT?**” with background for the leader and helpful references for expanding the learning. This fifth lesson may be taught as one longer continuous session, such as at a retreat setting, or as separate sessions (approximately one hour) that cover each page of the session. You may wish to have youth view the website, or individual pages, on their own, then gather as a group to discuss and explore the learning. The website is also useful within the classroom as a teaching tool to introduce the material, then youth may revisit it later to reinforce learning at home.

While the curriculum offers prompts for guiding conversation and offers direction for teaching the material, it is important to prepare your own answers for questions and notes for discussion. Sharing your personal experience and insight with the group is a valuable resource for these lessons.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, the students will be better able to:

- Develop a more broad understanding of the causes of good and evil in the world
- Compare scientific and religious perspectives on the origins of good and evil

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The conversation between faith/religion and science can be difficult to navigate with youth who live in a world where they are bombarded by a great amount of information and opinions. It is important to first set a safe learning environment where differing opinions are respected and confidentiality is secured.

You may also want to consult with parents/guardians prior to beginning this session to alert them to the concepts taught in this session, and invite them to preview the website. Many adults are unfamiliar with ways to talk about both science and religion, or may have beliefs that are challenged by this learning.

Within any group of youth you will find a wide range of maturity and development levels. In general, adolescent-aged students (12-14) are able to engage in more complex thinking, reason deductively, and are better able to form concepts about the past, present, and future than their elementary counterparts. As adolescence is achieved, they can synthesize values and beliefs with their own experiences to create meaning and understanding for life. This is also a time when a sense of personal identity is being formed, and this extends to their identity as it relates to the concepts of science and faith.

SUPPLIES FOR SESSION ONE

- Computer and access to Internet
- Bible *optional*

TO BEGIN:

Gather youth and provide an overview of lesson(s) to be covered in **GOOD AND EVIL – BIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: SINNER OR SAINT?** session(s). If this lesson is held separately from the previous lesson, review the need for a safe and confidential environment (See Lesson 1 – Leader Guide). Ask youth to recall ways for their group to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. If possible, review these ideas previously listed on a white board, or a computer document and read the completed list. Ask all present, youth and adults, to agree to follow these guidelines for the duration of the learning time together.

PAGE ONE – GOOD AND EVIL – BIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: SINNER OR SAINT?

Begin the session by discussing the general concepts of good and evil as they apply to humans. Ensure that other group members allow each member to share personal views without judgment. Encourage the group to explore the biological and theological causes as a way of understanding good and evil rather than simply placing judgment onto another person.

Ask: How do you define evil? *Allow all answers.*
How do you define good? *Allow all answers.*

Ask the group to think about situations where people behaved in either a good or an evil manner. Discuss the possible reasons for why a person might commit acts of good or evil. *Allow discussion to continue for a long as time allows.*

Review with the class the website information on the area of PAGE ONE prior to the link, and encourage discussion on the information presented. If necessary, review the story of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis in the Bible (Chapter 3, verses 1 – 24).

Next: Have the group watch the video clip in the link: “Jekyll and Hyde – creative response” with the sound turned off in order to focus on the words that appear in the video. Next, turn the sound on, but have the group listen with eyes closed to only hear the lyrics of the song.

Allow the group to share their initial reactions to the video, and then discuss the following questions/issues presented in the video:

Who decides what is good and bad in society?

The video states that everyone has two sides, one evil and one good. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

Does either good or evil always win or overpower the other?
Encourage the group to give examples of each option as they see it occurring in society.

If time after the discussion, have the group watch the video clip again and

discuss any other ideas or questions they might have on the topic of good and evil.

Next, discuss with the group why they feel that some who follow a religious tradition and some scientists disagree about the claims for either the biological or theological source of good and evil in humans. Be attentive to the need for each group member to honor the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of each other. Allow the discussion to continue for as long as interest is maintained. You may continue on with the lesson to PAGE TWO – THE TWO SIDES, or bring the session to a close.

If the session will end, encourage students to keep track of any conversations they observe or have experienced with friends or family regarding the claims the causes of good and evil. Encourage students to bring this information back to future sessions. Ask the group to look for reported events of behavior that they consider to be good or evil and bring any related information back to the next session.

PAGE TWO – THE TWO SIDES

NOTE TO LEADERS: This portion of the lesson is long and you may not have sufficient time to complete all of the material presented on **PAGE TWO – THE TWO SIDES**. The next section, “WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL” is shorter and you may want to combine some of the material to allow for the variance in lesson length.

SUPPLIES FOR SESSION TWO

- Large sheet of paper large enough to trace an outline of a person
- Markers
- Computer and access to the Internet

TO BEGIN:

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members to relate any conversations that they might have observed or experienced with others or any other information they may have gathered regarding behaviors of good or evil.

Begin the lesson by reviewing the information from the first paragraph on PAGE TWO. If necessary, return to PAGE ONE to view the Jekyll and Hyde video again. Ask the group to respond to the following question:

Is what causes a person to behave in particular way the result of the workings of the brain and how it is affected, or are there religious ways to understand choices a person might make? *Allow all answers.*

Next, have one person in the group serve as a model for drawing a full-sized outline of a human. Place the large sheet of paper on the floor and have the person lie down on top of it. Using the marker, trace a rough outline of the person onto the paper. Hang the outline onto a wall where all will have access to write on it. Draw a line down the middle of the outline and label one side “Biology” and one side “Theology.”

With “PAGE TWO” of the lesson displayed on a computer, have the group read through and explore the links under the section “THE SCIENTIFIC SIDE.” Discuss the three examples of biological influences on behavior.

Continue discussion as time allows. Help the group to understand that these examples are only a few that might represent this issue. Also reinforce the idea that not all people with epilepsy or brain injury behave in an aggressive or violent manner.

Next, ask the group members to think of words or phrases that represent how science has considered the function of the brain or biology to be responsible for the way a person behaves. Have the group write these words or phrases on the “SCIENTIFIC SIDE” of the outline.

Continue with the lesson by having the group read through and explore the links under the section “THE THEOLOGICAL SIDE.” Discuss the different religious views and how they might vary in their understanding of good and evil.

Next, ask the group members to think of words or phrases that represent how theology has considered the function of the brain or biology to be responsible for the way a person behaves. Have the group write these words or phrases on the “THEOLOGICAL SIDE” of the outline.

After all of the members have contributed words or phrases to the outline, ask the group to consider the reasons for why someone might prefer one side or the other.

Ask: What is the most difficult thing for you to understand or believe about how a person might choose to do something good or evil? *Allow all answers and encourage youth to think about how there might be many ways of thinking about this subject.*

To close this portion of the lesson, ask the group if they can tell one way that they might talk to others about the scientific and theological viewpoints of good and evil.

If the session will end, encourage students to ask family and friends about their understanding of good and evil and its causes. Be sure to save the large outline used to record words and phrases from this session. This will be used for the final session.

PAGE THREE – WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?

NOTE TO LEADERS: This portion of the lesson is shorter and you may want to combine some of the material presented on the previous section **PAGE TWO – THE TWO SIDES** to allow for the variance in lesson length.

SUPPLIES FOR SESSION THREE

- Computer and access to Internet

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any conversations they might have had with family or friends regarding their understanding of both the scientific and theological side of good and evil.

Prior to gathering the group to review this third page, preview the slide show at the top of the page and become familiar with the following information:

The slideshow displayed at the top of this page contains a number of images that represent the subject of good and evil. These are images that are among the many available in the media and on the Internet and are only a small representation of what youth might encounter. The group will view these images during this portion of the lesson. From the start of the slide show they appear as follows:

A yin yang symbol

A picture of the character Gollum from the “Lord of the Rings”

A picture of the superhero “Superman”

A picture of Mother Teresa

A picture of the brain showing the functions of each area

To begin this portion of the lesson, have page three visible to the group and ask:

Who do you consider to be an example of someone who is good or who has done much good in the world?

Who do you consider to be an example of someone who is evil or who has done much evil in the world?

Who do you consider to have acted in ways you consider to be both good and evil? *An example might be of someone who has worked to help others but has lied or committed a crime such as drunk driving and injuring another person.*

Next, click on the link about the case of a young teen and read the article aloud to the group or have members of the group take turns reading the article. You may also click on the link to read or review the full article.

Discuss with the group the article and any reactions they might want to share with the group. Ask: If you were a friend of Christopher Tiegreen, how would you feel about his actions? Should he be sent to prison for his actions, or given another chance at receiving help for his condition? *Help the group members stay focused on the issue of the brain injury and resulting actions of Christopher instead of moving into a debate about the justice system. Continue discussion as time allows.*

Next, return to page three of the lesson and share the remaining information with the group.

Ask: How might a person of faith view the case of Christopher Tiegreen? *Allow all answers and encourage the group to return to PAGE TWO – THE TWO SIDES and review the religious viewpoints presented. Alternately you may want to look at lesson three “I Believe in the Holy Spirit” to also consider ways that Christians view how God acts in the world and is involved in human behavior.*

Discuss the ways that both sides of biology and theology might agree or disagree with the decision that Tiegreen is mentally competent and accountable for his actions. *Help the group understand that both the biological and theological sides might have opposing views. Biologically, he was considered to be impaired by a neurobiologist and competent by a psychologist. Theologically, he might be viewed as having committed a*

serious sin and therefore evil, or as the Dalai Lama states: “We cannot view that individual as ‘an evil person,’ intrinsically and permanently evil, because there is always the potential or possibility that a new set of conditions will come into play and that very same person may no longer engage in the evil behavior.”

Next, have the group look at the slideshow at the top of the page, and ask that everyone wait until all pictures are viewed before making comments. Invite the group to respond to the images and allow time for each member to add to the conversation.

Using the information provided at the beginning of this session, talk about each of the images. (Remind the group to be respectful of each other’s response.) The white dots that appear at the lower right of the slideshow can be used to select and navigate through the ten images.

Ask the group to share what each image might mean to them, or how the image might cause them to respond to the understandings of good and evil. Use the following as prompts for discussion:

A yin yang symbol is often associated with positive vs. negative, good vs. evil, darkness vs. light in life. Use the link below to read a history of the symbol:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/653297/yinyang>

The picture of Gollum might represent the struggle of good and evil within each person. Gollum was obsessed with taking possession of the evil and powerful ring that Frodo was trying to return to the fires of Mordor. While Frodo was considered to be good in his quest to destroy the evil power of the ring, he also became overwhelmed by its evil power. Was Frodo good or evil?

The picture of Superman might represent the power of good to overcome evil in the world. It might also be an example of altruism as Superman often places his life at risk in order to save others. Does the power of good always win?

Mother Teresa is an icon of being a good person who has given their life to help others. For some this might be an example of the good that

exists within each person. Do all people have the potential to do the same?

The picture of the brain might represent the side of science that claims only a biological explanation for behavior. Are we a product of the workings of the brain, or are there religious influences for how we choose to behave?

To close the session, talk about what these images might promote that is challenging or helpful to the conversation about scientific and religious views of good and evil. Ask that they spend time at home looking at the website and researching other information about ideas covered in the lesson. Ask each member to bring a copy of any images that represent their understanding of the material.

PAGE FOUR – MAKING CONNECTIONS

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any research they might have completed that tells about the ideas covered in the previous lesson. Ask the group to share any images that they might have brought to this session. Prior to the session, display the outline created from the lesson material on **PAGE TWO**.

This final page of **GOOD AND EVIL – BIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: SINNER OR SAINT?** is designed to help youth focus on both the scientific and religious views of human behavior as good or evil.

SUPPLIES FOR SESSION FOUR

- Computer and access to Internet
- Traced outline with group responses from SESSION TWO
- Markers

To begin the session, open the website and review the first three pages of **GOOD AND EVIL – BIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY: SINNER OR SAINT?**

Next, review the responses on the traced outline from **PAGE TWO**. Ask the group members to share one significant thing they may have learned or discovered about the scientific and religious views of good and evil. Discuss how they might have engaged other youth or family members in this learning and any conversations that might have occurred, either in person or in a social media setting.

Next, look at page four, **MAKING CONNECTIONS**, and review the information listed on the page. Watch the video, "Explanation of the problem of evil and the Christian response." Ask the group to list four or five ways that they or others they know have responded to the concepts of good and evil. Reinforce the concept that it is important to see things from different sides and refrain from taking a rigid perspective that creates intolerance for one or the other view. Help the group understand that this learning is a basic way of looking at this issue, and that just like science and religion, their ideas will change and become more complex.

Next, ask the group to consider how they might respond to others about the biological and theological understandings of good and evil as a result of the learning in this lesson. Encourage the group to consider ways to respond from both a scientific and religious viewpoint. Write the responses on the centerline drawn down the middle of the traced outline. Ask the group to reflect on how their understanding of this issue may or may not have changed.

For additional learning, ask a member of the congregation or other source who has a career in medicine to come and share how they integrate their faith and scientific beliefs about human behavior.