

WEEK 3 TEACHING GUIDE

CATALYST

BIG IDEA

Jesus is the catalyst for a new relationship with God.

BIBLE

Hebrews 4:14-16; Matthew 27:51;
John 3:16-17

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | Diet Coke and Mentos Roulette

- Welcome back to *Catalyst*, where we're talking about things that transform our faith, because transformation is exactly what catalysts do.
- But let's remind ourselves what a catalyst is — and yes, we'll be doing another science experiment. Sort of. Are you familiar with what happens when you mix Diet Coke and Mentos?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, recruit a few adult volunteers to participate (unless you want to see what happens when teenagers are given bottles of exploding soda). We suggest doing this outside, but it can be done inside with a [tarp](#) and some ponchos. To play, you'll need at least three bottles of Diet Coke (but you can use as many as you'd like), a package of [mint Mentos](#), clear fishing line, a safety pin, and scissors. Unscrew the caps of all of the bottles. Replace some of the caps, but leave at least one of the caps off — this will be the bottle that explodes when a mint is added. Watch [this video](#) for a demonstration of how to booby trap your exploding bottle. First, poke a hole through the center of the mint with the pin, thread fishing line through the hole, and tie it tight. Hold the mint inside the neck of the bottle (without touching the soda) with the fishing line hanging outside of the bottle. Loosely replace the cap, pull the fishing line tight until the mint touches the cap, and then close the cap tightly. Cut any string still hanging out of the bottle. When the activity begins, have your volunteers take turns opening their bottles until one of them releases the mint and it explodes. Watch [this video](#) to get an idea of what this activity looks like.*
- What was once just a simple bottle of Diet Coke erupted into chaos when it was introduced to a seemingly harmless candy.
 - So what's a catalyst? In this case, it was the Mentos. A catalyst is anything that causes a big change to happen.
 - Before the Mentos, we just had a boring soda. After the Mentos, we got a whole party!

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **Who's one of your favorite fictional characters who experienced a dramatic transformation?**
 - **What's an example of a dramatic transformation someone might experience in real life?**

POLL | "Do you know anyone whose life was changed dramatically by Jesus?"

- There are a lot of catalysts (like this mint) that create pretty distinct "before and after" scenarios. We've seen a few of them already throughout this series. When some catalysts are introduced, it changes things instantly and dramatically.
- If you've been here for a few weeks, you know we've been talking a lot about faith — like how faith changes things and what kinds of things have the power to change our faith.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For each of the following questions, ask students to respond by raising their hands, standing up, or saying "yes." After each question, ask a few students to explain their responses or share more.*
 - **Have you ever heard the phrase "faith story"?**
 - **Have you ever heard someone share their faith story?**
 - **Have you ever heard a story where someone's life was immediately and dramatically changed by Jesus?**
 - **Do you know anyone personally whose life was immediately and dramatically changed by Jesus?**
- When we talk about God's power to transform us, the picture we sometimes paint is a little bit like that bottle of Diet Coke. We make it seem as though the moment you meet Jesus, your whole life is going to explode and nothing will ever be the same.
- And sure, sometimes that's exactly what happens. But can I be honest? Sometimes that stresses me out.
 - What if my faith story isn't all that dramatic?
 - What if following Jesus hasn't made me feel as close to God as I thought it would?
 - What if, since meeting Jesus, my life seems to be changing kind of slowly rather than instantly?
- Sometimes faith feels a little bit like a game of Mentos Roulette, doesn't it? For some people, dropping Jesus into their life seems like it results in an obvious and immediate change. But for some of us, when we don't see Jesus change our lives in the ways we thought he would, or in the time frame we thought he would, we worry something is wrong.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **Have you ever heard a story where someone's life was immediately and dramatically changed by Jesus? How did that story impact you?**
 - ★ **If you know Jesus, have you ever worried your story of faith isn't dramatic enough? If so, why?**
 - ★ **If someone decides to follow Jesus but their life doesn't immediately change that dramatically, what are some possible reasons for that?**

STORY | **Talk about a time you didn't feel close with God.**

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Talk about a time in your own life (or ask a student or volunteer to talk about a time) you didn't feel close with God. Maybe you didn't feel emotionally connected, or didn't feel like God was hearing your prayers, or weren't seeing a specific change in your life you expected to see. Don't share how you got over this — instead, simply share what you were feeling and wondering during that time.*
- I don't know what your faith is like right now.
 - Maybe you've heard people talk about having a relationship with God, but you're still trying to figure out what that means.

- Maybe you have a relationship with God and it's going great!
- Or maybe you have a relationship with God, but it's not going as well as you wanted it to.
- If you've ever wondered what it means to have a relationship with God, or how we can really know God is real, or what to do when God feels far away, you're not alone.

SCRIPTURE | Hebrews 4:14

- Because the idea of faith can be pretty confusing sometimes, we've been trying to figure out what Scripture says about it by looking at the book of Hebrews — a book that has a lot to say about faith.
- And because holding onto our faith can feel pretty difficult when we feel far from God, I want to show you a passage in Hebrews that has something to say about holding on.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Hebrews 4:14.*
- Okay, so maybe you got the message that we're supposed to hold tightly to our faith . . . but, uh, what's that about a great high priest?

VIDEO | A Clip from "Jesus the Royal Priest" by BibleProject

- Remember, the book of Hebrews was written to a very specific group of people — the people of Israel, God's chosen people. The whole Old Testament is their story.
- Because this book was written to them, it makes sense for the author to use terms and ideas that they would understand, even if it means you and I need a little extra explaining to understand it.
 - Throughout much of Israel's history, God communicated with humanity in a very specific way — through priests.
 - All of Israel's priests communicated with God on their people's behalf. But in order to have this role, the priests had to practice a very high standard of holiness and purity by following specific religious customs.
 - Although Israel had many priests, the high priest was the only priest who had the privilege of getting closest to God — literally. The high priest was the only person allowed in the Most Holy Place, the location where God's presence was closest and most obvious.
 - When the high priest was in the Most Holy Place, he would perform rituals and make sacrifices to God to help keep the relationship between God and Israel close.
 - So why is Hebrews calling Jesus a "great high priest"? To answer that, let's back up and see what was going on with the high priests when Jesus was around.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip (1:00-2:30) from "Jesus the Royal Priest" by BibleProject. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 27:51

- So the author of Hebrews didn't invent this idea of Jesus being like a priest! In fact, you know that curtain that separated everyone except the high priest from where God was, in the Most Holy Place?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 27:51.*
- When Jesus gave his life sacrificially for us, that whole curtain was ripped in two, showing us there is nothing left to separate us from God.
- Jesus' death was the catalyst that tore the curtain in half. Because of him, we can all finally be close to God.

SCRIPTURE | Hebrews 4:14-16

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Hebrews 4:14-16.*
- So is this making a little more sense now?
 - Because he's our great high priest, Jesus made it possible for us to get close to God.

- Because he has experienced all the temptations we experience, Jesus understands what we're going through.
- Because Jesus changed our relationship with God forever, we don't have to be shy about asking for help.
- I know sometimes God feels far away. I know sometimes it seems like our lives aren't changing as immediately or dramatically as we thought they would. But no matter how things seem, can you see what's true?
 - Jesus changed our relationship with God forever. He did that through his life, death, and resurrection. It's already done!
 - Before Jesus, our relationship with God had never been so personal, but Jesus brought God closer by giving everyone access to love and grace.
- So if you ever doubt God's ability to change things, remember what Jesus has already changed. **Jesus is the catalyst for a new relationship with God.** Because of him, God is already close.

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

IMAGE | No Wait Time

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, show an image of people waiting in line for a roller coaster, [like this one](#).*
- Have you ever waited for hours for a ride at an amusement park? Sometimes the wait can take forever. Sometimes you're waiting and it starts to rain. Sometimes you finally get to the front and the ride breaks down or you realize you're not tall enough to ride. Sometimes the waiting is so daunting that you eventually just give up.
- But with God, we don't have to do that. It's like Jesus gives us a "fast pass" that never expires. He invites to connect with God differently, personally, and easily.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **Have you ever felt really close to God? What was that experience like and why do you think God felt so close?**
 - **Read John 3:16-17. When God doesn't feel close, what can this passage teach us about what God is like?**
 - **When God doesn't feel close, what do you think we should do?**

STORY | **Talk about a time your relationship with God changed in a small but important way.**

- Okay, but maybe you're still frustrated because, even though you believe in Jesus and have a relationship with God, God still seems far away, or your life before Jesus doesn't seem all that different from your life after Jesus.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to share a story) about a time your relationship with God changed in a small but important way. Maybe God changed your perspective about something, or revealed something to you through Scripture, or began to transform a specific part of your life. Share what changed and how.*
- When we say Jesus is the catalyst for our new relationship with God, we mean two things:
 - Jesus permanently changed humanity's relationship with God, once and for all.

- But on top of that, Jesus is still changing us and our relationship with God all the time, as often as we let him. Sometimes he transforms our lives in big, obvious, Mentos-and-Coke kind of ways. But most of the time, Jesus is transforming us in ways that are a little less noticeable.

REFLECTION | Jesus Is Our Catalyst

- So what do you need Jesus to change about your relationship with God right now?
 - **Do you need Jesus to change your relationship with God for the first time?** Is the good news of Jesus brand new to you? If so, today could be the start of a whole new relationship with God.
 - **Do you need Jesus to change something in your life?** Have you been feeling disconnected because you've been making unwise choices, getting stuck in bad habits, or spending time with people who pull you away from God? Have you said you believe in Jesus but been hesitant to really let him transform you? Jesus has the power to transform you from the inside out, but he's not going to force you to make a change you don't want to make.
 - **Do you need Jesus to help you get close to God again?** Have you been following Jesus for a while, but haven't made time for God like you used to, or you have questions you're not sure you're allowed to ask, or you just don't think you're as passionate about God as you used to? Remember, God hasn't gone anywhere. Because of Jesus, God is always close by and ready to help. All you have to do is reach out.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your program, print and cut the handouts provided in your Week 3 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. Encourage students to fill it out and share it with a friend, mentor, or their small group.
- No matter which option you chose (or if you chose none at all), if you want to experience a new relationship with God:
 - **TAKE THE FIRST STEP:** Jesus is our catalyst, but he can't transform us if we don't give him the invitation and opportunity.
 - **PRACTICE SPIRITUAL HABITS:** If we want to get and stay close to God, we can do our part by practicing the habits that keep us close:
 - **Spend time with God** on your own, through prayer, worship, and Scripture.
 - **Spend time with others** who can help you grow, through healthy relationships and conversations.
 - **Use your gifts** to give back to God and serve others.
 - **Share your story** of faith with others, even when your story feels imperfect or incomplete.
 - **SEE WHAT HAS CHANGED:** While you wait to see how Jesus will change you next, take a step back and see how you've changed already. Change isn't always obvious while it's happening, but there's a really good chance Jesus has already changed you in some big ways since you first met him.
- Because of Jesus, we can *get* close to God and then *stay* close to God. The closer we stay, the more we'll change, because that's how catalysts work. And **Jesus is our catalyst for a new relationship with God.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - **If you know Jesus, when did you first believe God loved you and wanted to be close to you?**
 - **This week, what's one step you want to take to get closer to God through Jesus?**