



# All Christians' Fellowship International

INTERACTIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL OUTLINE FOR YOUTHS AND YOUNG ADULTS

## Foundations

### The Things We Do in the Dark

## Overview

### Summary

In this *Foundations* series, you will unpack the topic of sin. There's no hiding the fact that the world and all who are in it suffer from brokenness. Brokenness, darkness, blindness... whatever we call it, the Bible calls it sin. It is what keeps us from God, keeps us from loving God, and keeps us from being like Christ. Sin is something none of us are unaffected by. It is within each of us and surrounding all of us. But there is hope. Christ has come to forgive us from our sin and rescue us from the sin around us. We can step into the light of Christ to be set free and healed.

### Key Takeaways

1. Brokenness is all around us.
2. All have sinned.
3. Every conversation about sin can also be a conversation about forgiveness.

### Scriptures

Romans 3:23 / Isaiah 5:20 / John 3:19-20 / Isaiah 59:9-13 / Micah 7:18-19

Let's start [tonight] off with a little word association game. I want you to hear the word I say, and then immediately you shout out whatever image pops into your mind first. So, if I say, SPORTS, you might picture and say, BASKETBALL! Ready?

ANIMAL [student response]

FOOD [student response]

HOME [student response]

SCHOOL [student response]

Ok, now here's the last one, but this time I don't want you to respond out loud... just try to get a good look at the picture that comes into your mind.... Ready? I want you to imagine... a.... sinner. [pause]

Again, don't respond out loud... but what did you see? What kind of image came to mind? Was it someone specific in your life whom you don't like? Someone mean – maybe a bully or a gossip? Or did you see something more general – maybe an image of a violent criminal or a scheming villain from a TV show you're watching? If so, that makes sense. But what the Bible teaches us is that sinners don't always look like some hardened criminal, and sin is not just crime. The Bible says that sin is something that affects every single one of us, including you and me. And sin can reach into our inner lives; it's not just our words and our actions, and it's not

just “the big stuff.” **Romans 3:23** tells us, **everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard**. Every time we go against God’s desire, that’s sin. The good news is: Sin doesn’t get the last word on us.

## Transition

Do you remember the allegory of Plato’s cave we’ve been talking about the last two weeks? For another week, we’re going to return to the captivity and shadows of the cave to talk about the darkness. The Bible calls the darkness sin. And it turns out, this darkness doesn’t just live around us in shadows and captors; this stuff gets into each of our hearts and minds. Before we can tell the truth about much else, God’s people have to tell the truth about sin. The Bible has lots of words for sin, like transgression, evil, iniquity, idolatry, and injustice. And it uses a lot of images, like darkness, to teach us about sin, too: images like missing the mark, debt, slavery, trespassing, and brokenness.

Sounds like a lot of fun to talk about, yeah?

But we have to talk about it. We have to see sin for what it is before we can see the truth of who we are. Jesus calls us to repent, to turn away from our sins so that we can turn toward God. But before we can repent, we need to know what it is we’re turning away from. Sin is tricky, and we have a knack for not recognizing it in ourselves. Talking openly about it – confessing our sinfulness to each other – is part of how we grow in our ability to distinguish between our sin and who God is calling us to be in Christ.

And do you know what else we get to talk about when we talk about sin? Jesus. Repentance. Forgiveness. Mercy. Four of the most beautiful words in the world. And they aren’t just words. They are reality. Our sin would have led us to death; but God has rerouted us. He has made a way for us, despite our sin, to land in the arms of Jesus. Jesus, who promises to forgive us, make us new, and restore us to God.

Now that’s worth talking about it. Let’s dive in.

## Point #1: Brokenness is all around us.

It’s no secret that we live in a world where some pretty messed up things happen. What’s even scarier, is that you and I are capable of doing some pretty messed up things. But you and I are also capable of saying “no” to the power of sin and, instead, letting God’s power live in and rule our hearts and minds. If faced with the choice of the power of sin or the power of God, that sounds like an easy call, right? Unfortunately, it doesn’t always play out that simply.

Sin is complicated because it is everywhere – including in our deepest nature. Sin is like a sickness that has infected all of creation. We tend to focus on the symptoms of that sickness when we talk about sin: lying, stealing, cheating, lust, violence – all the things we do and say and think that are wrong. But like with sickness, suppressing the symptoms isn’t the same thing as healing the disease. We sin because we are sinners, not the other way around.

The disease of sin is so widespread – in us and in the world around us – that we have a hard time even recognizing its symptoms as symptoms. We’ve gotten used to being sick and to living in a sick world. We struggle to tell the difference between right and wrong – between things that are good and healthy for us and things that are bad and destructive.

**Isaiah 5:20** says, **What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter**. To go along with our sickness metaphor, we can add: What sorrow for those who say disease is health, and health is disease.

Just like we can't cure disease ourselves, we can't sort out right and wrong for ourselves. The only way out of this confusion is to step into the light of God which Jesus shines into our world. If we step into the light, our sins will be exposed; if we stay in the dark, they will remain hidden. It's a big choice: Exposure is scary, and yet it's necessary. We can't turn away from sin that we don't recognize. We can't ask for grace if we don't think we need it.

Some people choose not to step into the light – they prefer to stay in the dark where they don't have to confront their sins. Jesus put it this way: “**God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.**” (**John 3:19-20**)

But followers of Jesus are called to live every day in the exposure of this light. We believe that any discomfort we feel in this bright light is only the pain of our sinful nature dying. Healing is a painful process, but we know that we need it – everyone needs it – and that leads us to our next point.

## Point #2: All have sinned.

Like **Romans 3:23** tells us, everyone has sinned – we all fall short of who God calls us to be. We sin anytime we think, speak, or act in ways that are against what God wants for us. No one gets a free pass on this... we are all born with the capacity and tendency for choosing against God. We all may struggle with different temptations, and some people may give in more than others, but all of us experience distance between us and God, a gap only God can close. The prophet Isaiah puts it like this:

So there is no justice among us,  
and we know nothing about right living.  
We look for light but find only darkness.  
We look for bright skies but walk in gloom.  
We grope like the blind along a wall,  
feeling our way like people without eyes.  
Even at brightest noontime,  
we stumble as though it were dark...

For our sins are piled up before God  
and testify against us.  
Yes, we know what sinners we are.  
We know we have rebelled and have denied the Lord.  
We have turned our backs on our God.  
We know how unfair and oppressive we have been,  
carefully planning our deceitful lies. **Isaiah 59:9–10a, 12–13**

That's not a pretty picture. And notice something... notice how Isaiah says “we.” Isaiah is talking here about the entire nation of Israel. Throughout Scripture we find that while sin is always personal, it isn't always individual. Our individual sinfulness compounds into systemic sinfulness. In other words, the disease doesn't just infect individuals; it also infects our political, social, and cultural institutions leading to widespread injustices like poverty, racism, and war.

Think about some of your favorite and common possessions for a moment... your phone, your sneakers, even chocolate. Where do they come from? Better yet: Who makes them? We just buy them at the store or online, but someone somewhere in the world assembled your products, and it may not have been in very nice working conditions. In fact, it might look like something very close to slave labor. Now you, of course, would never treat any person like that... but what

is our involvement if we knowingly support the system that does?

This example shows us just how deep the brokenness of the world runs. Before we despair, let's ask: Where is the light? Remember, we are God's people, and God has sent his Son into the world to show us the way out of darkness. That leads to the good news of our last point....

### Point #3: Every conversation about sin can be a conversation about forgiveness.

In God's kindness, he has not left us to drown in our sin. If we don't turn to God, our sin will rule over us. We, like the ancient Israelites, can turn our back on the one true God and worship false idols. Sin is very powerful, but it's not as powerful as God. God takes our sin really seriously, but it doesn't make God stop loving us. The prophet Micah exclaims,

Where is another God like you,  
who pardons the guilt of the remnant,  
overlooking the sins of his special people?  
You will not stay angry with your people forever,  
because you delight in showing unfailing love.

Once again you will have compassion on us.  
You will trample our sins under your feet  
and throw them into the depths of the ocean!

**Micah 7:18–19**

You don't have to beg God to forgive you. God delights in showing mercy. God knows that we are human and will not shame us for our sins, but God also won't let us stay in them, chained and unchanged. When we ask God to forgive us, you can be sure that he will. And not only will God forgive, He will also help us to turn from evil and will heal the brokenness sin caused.

There is such freedom for God's people! And God invites us into freedom, not just to receive it, but also to share with God in forgiving us.

### Closing

Consider for a moment what you do when you realize you have sinned. What's the process that begins after that awareness? We might know we should ask God to forgive us, but what does that look like? Is it when your head has hit the pillow, and we feel guilty and just want to forget about it, so we close our eyes tight, pray silently in our minds for God to forgive us, and then try to fall asleep as fast as possible? That's one way to do it. But there's another.

Christians have always practiced confession— talking about our sins with a trustworthy Christian. We can't just air our dirty laundry out to everyone, but we can find someone who can handle hearing about our sins. Someone who, when we confess our sins, won't condemn us, and also someone who won't just blow them off like it's not a big deal. Someone who will say to us, "God forgives you, and so do I." Someone who can help us realize both the need for our change and the reality of God's forgiveness.

We also learn to ask the person against whom we sinned to forgive us. The Scripture makes it clear that sinning against God is tied to sinning against our neighbor. When we act wrongly toward someone, it's not enough to ask God to forgive us. Our sins have consequences on other people. We should go to them, apologize, and ask them to forgive us. Hopefully we will hear, "God forgives you, and so do I."

Finally, as people who have received forgiveness, we want to be people who give forgiveness. When someone comes to us and confesses sin, we don't want to say, "Ah, it's okay!" Because that's just the thing... it isn't okay. That's what makes it sin. We hurt God when we hurt other people. But God who heals all the brokenhearted can restore us. And those who have received mercy want to give mercy! So, then we, the people of marvelous light, can be people who look at others and say, "God forgives you, and so do I."

## Discussion Questions

1. In John 3, why do you think some people love the darkness and hate the light?
2. What definitions of "sin" have you heard before? How do the passages in Isaiah expand your understanding of what sin is?
3. Why do you think it's easier to point out what's wrong in the world than it is to see the sin inside of us?
4. Why do you think it's so hard to recognize your own sin? What steps can you take to become aware of your sin so you can turn away from it?
5. How do you react when someone points out your sin? Do you start making excuses? Deny any wrongdoing?
6. What do you think it would look like to receive their correction and step into the light?
7. How does sin affect our relationship with God?