There are basically three views on how sinful we are. You can think of them on a scale like this:

You’re basically good You’re bad, but can overcome it Just admit it,

 your wicked to the core

The left dot represents the most common belief among those who are not Christians. Most people think we are born good, or at least neutral (with no tendency towards good or evil). These people will have a problem explaining why so many bad things happen though. If people are basically good, why are there mass murders, bombings, robberies, etc.?

The middle dot represents the typical Christian in America (Arminianism). They say that we are not so much “dead in sin,” as we are “really sick with sin.” An illustration may be someone on their death bed. They are very weak, and cannot do most things. However, they can summon up the power to do good if they really try. Within them is the “power to the contrary.”

The dot on the right represents the Biblical view of man. This is not the way we want to think of ourselves, but apart from Christ this is our true identity. The Bible is a mirror where we see the true reflection of our nature. If we don’t look at it, we will deceive ourselves into thinking we are at least some level of good.

Let’s look at some Scriptures: Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:10-18; Eccl. 7:10; Psalm 58:3.

Perhaps the students will need some help discovering how sinful they really are. Tell them to take the test: How many lies have they told in their lives? How prevalent is lust in their hearts? How often do they do everything to the glory of God? Do they live each moment as if they were in the presence of God? Remind them that God’s law affects not just outward actions, but inward thoughts.

Better yet, tell them that sin is so prevalent in our lives that we do not even notice most of it! 99% of our sin goes unnoticed because it is so much a part of us.

I used to work as a “fry guy” at a fast food restaurant. When I came home from work my mother would tell me that I smelled like a French fry. I didn’t notice it because I was so used to it.

That’s the way we are with our sin!

Some people think that it is bad to think of ourselves this way. They say we shouldn’t have a “worm theology,” but instead have a “positive attitude.” Do you think they are right? What happens if you do? Why is it good to understand the depth of your sin?”

Explain that we are not as sinful as we could very well be. God restrains our sin and keeps us from all killing ourselves. If a man gets angry, it might be necessary to restrain him so that he doesn’t punch his opponent in the nose. This is what God does. This is why we say, “Except for the grace of God, there go I!”

It is important to understand that sin is not due to our environment, but due to the condition of our hearts. Begin to address this by posing the following question.

What things cause us to sin?

1. A parent’s bad example
2. A tempting cookie left out on the counter.
3. The devil’s power to tempt

It is a trick question. The answer is “none of the above.” We sin because “we are tempted and lured away by our own desire.” James 1:14

Use the illustration of a celery stick in kool-aid. The leaves of the celery turn red. Why? Because the kool-aid is at the root of its being.

Sin is like this. It is at the root of our being. As a result it affects everything we do (our will, all our actions, etc). This is why Isaiah says that even our best works are as filthy rags.

Lastly, talk about our free will. We should not deny free will, but we should recognize that the will is yet in bondage to sin. In other words, we are free to chose as we please. But what is it we choose? It is sin, because we love it!

Example: If I have chocolate ice cream and vanilla before me, I am free to choose either one. If I hate chocolate, I will most certainly choose the vanilla. I will chose according to my preference.

Or: I am free to chose to fly. However, my nature is such that I cannot. I willingly chose to walk.

So it is with our everyday choices between sin and righteousness. I chose sin because that is my nature.

[You may need to discuss the fact that we love to sin. This might sound offensive at first, or kids might not want to admit it. But we never do anything we don’t want to do. We actually like sinning, and it is only when Christ changes our nature/preferences that we will actually start obeying.]