

WEEK 4
LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

When you feel unwanted,
God says you belong.

BIBLE

Mark 5:1-20; Psalm 34:17-20;
John 15:15

ABOUT THIS WEEK

Most video games need non-playable characters, or NPCs, to move the story forward, but some interactions with an NPC leave you wishing to get them out of your way. This week, we'll take a look at the story of a man who was pushed to the edges of society because a demon possessed him. When the people in his town were scared of him, Jesus showed him **when you feel unwanted, God says you belong.**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | IRL Among Us

- Welcome to the final week of our series, *Restart*, where we have been looking at moments when it would be great if we were living in a video game. Moments where we made a mistake or something happened to us, and we want a redo. Let's kick off our time with a game where restarts could be really helpful!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you will need five to seven decks of cards, a noisemaker, a few packs of markers, about 30 pennies, a bin of LEGO, a few Nerf blasters, twenty plastic cups, a half-full bottle of water, three to five party streamer rollers (have a few more on hand in case a few of them break), eight stamps, stamp pads, eight straws, a bunch of index cards, and an [Among Us Mask](#) for each teen.*
 - *Before your program begins, set up at least three stations in your room (or more if you have a larger group of students) and set up the noisemaker on a table in the center of the playing area. Here are some station ideas you might want to choose from...*
 - **Station #1:** *You'll need a few boxes of 24 markers for this station. Before the game, mismatch the covers with the markers (for example, black with orange and yellow with green) and put them back in their box. The task is to take out the markers, put the covers back on the correct marker, show the table leader, mix them up again, and put them back in their box.*
 - **Station #2:** *Grab five pennies and start with them all heads up. The task to complete is to flip them into tails.*
 - **Station #3:** *Grab a handful of colored LEGO. The task to complete is to sort all of the blocks by color and then throw them back in the bin.*
 - **Station #4:** *Use a Nerf blaster. Stack five cups pyramid-style and knock down all the cups.*
 - **Station #5:** *Grab a deck of cards. Make sure they are mixed up. Put all the club cards, ace to the king, in order. Show the volunteer at the station. And then, have them shuffle the cards and put them back in the box.*
 - **Station #6:** *Grab a half bottle of water. Flip the bottle and get it to land upright.*
 - **Station #7:** *Find a party streamer roll. Unroll the streamer as quickly as possible and then roll it back up.*

- To play, choose eight cards from the deck that indicate if a teen is an Imposter (for example, aces and jacks). Spread everyone around the playing area and close their eyes. The game starts with all the contestants around a bell, buzzer, or noisemaker. Hand out a card from the deck to every teen. This will indicate who will be Imposters—the rest will be the crew. In addition, hand out an index card to every person playing. When someone is voted off, they reveal if they were a Crewmate or an Imposter. The game ends when the Imposters are voted off or outnumber the crew.
 - **IMPOSTERS:** Ask the Imposters to open their eyes and have a volunteer give them a straw. For the Imposter to win, they must get rid of the Crewmates by tapping them on the shoulder with a straw. Crewmates fall and cannot make a sound when they get tapped on the shoulder.
 - **CREWMATES:** The Crewmates' job is to get everyone to complete all the tasks. To do this, have volunteers at each station. After a teen completes a task, have the volunteer stamp their index card. Once they get all seven stamps, have them turn in their card to the game leader. They can then go and help their fellow Crewmates accomplish their tasks. If they find a fellow Crewmate who is down, they can call an emergency meeting using the noise maker in the center of the room. During the meeting, everybody, including the Imposter, has two minutes to cast a vote of who is the Imposter.
- Sometimes, it's hard to see when someone doesn't belong, like the "Imposter" and "Crewmates." Other times, it's pretty obvious.
- We all may have had moments where we've felt like an imposter or someone who doesn't belong. When that happens, it doesn't feel very good. What do we do when we feel unwanted or out of place?

VIDEO | A Clip of a Fortnite Concert

- In 2017, the incredibly popular game *Fortnite* was released. Two years later, history was made when DJ Marshmello held the first virtual concert inside *Fortnite*, and millions of people attended. Check it out.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip (0:26–1:40) from [Marshmello's Fortnite Concert](#). We always suggest viewing the clip beforehand to make sure you think it's a video that will be a good fit for your context. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
- There were 10.7 million people who attended this online concert. It was one of the largest concert events in history. And amid millions of people experiencing something together, the song highlights something we all feel. It says, "I'm so alone. Nothing feels like home."
- Interestingly, the song he highlights when millions are together highlights how alone we feel. We have more ways to connect with people than ever, but loneliness is still something we all regularly experience.
 - Maybe the time you feel unwanted in a classroom full of people.
 - Or you're on a stage giving a speech for an award you won.
 - Or you're sitting around a table at a family gathering with people who love you.
 - Or maybe you have ten conversations in ten different apps with ten people but still feel like you don't belong.
- How can we be so connected or surrounded by people yet still feel alone? What do we do when we feel this way? Who can we turn to to help us with our feelings of being unwanted or alone?

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - What's your favorite video game to play with a group of people?
 - When was a time you felt like you belonged? What made you feel that way?
 - *If you are comfortable sharing, when was a time you felt like you didn't belong? What made you feel excluded?

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

SCRIPTURE | Mark 5:1–5

- One amazing thing about the Bible is that even though it was written thousands of years ago, people had similar experiences to the ones we have today and insights on what God is up to in the midst of them.

- The book of Mark recounts the life of Jesus, and in one story, he encounters a lonely and unwanted guy. Due to a condition he has, the townspeople are scared of him. They don't want him around and have forced him to live outside in a graveyard.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Mark 5:1–5.*
- This man, tormented by demons, lived alone. He was an unwanted outcast who was bound by chains. His community created a label that followed him for years. He had no place to belong and didn't fit in anywhere. By living alone in the tombs, he knew people didn't want him around. He thought he was scary, beyond help, and maybe even deserved this. But nothing could have been further from the truth. This is not the picture of community and belonging God wants for him or us.
- Maybe similarly, you have received those same messages when you have tried to find a place to belong. You have been told you're not wanted, scary, can't be helped, or even deserve your loneliness.

SCRIPTURE | Mark 5:6–20

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Mark 5:6–20.*
- When Jesus shows up, things change. The man ran out to greet Jesus, and did you notice that Jesus didn't turn and run away? Jesus offered him a place to belong, didn't think he was scary, and wanted to help him. He stayed present and didn't run. Instead of doing what everyone else had done, Jesus showed compassion.
- After years of feeling unwanted in his town, I can imagine this man was afraid that this might be too good to be true. After people in the city didn't want him around and pushed him to the outside, seeing someone come close to him and interact with him felt too good to be true.
- Could it be that someone would get close to him? Could it be that someone would create belonging for him, and he wouldn't have to feel alone and on the outside looking in ever again?
- Just like Jesus didn't turn away or run away from this man, he doesn't turn away or run away from us. He wants to be with and close to us.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ***What do you think makes us want to exclude others?**
 - **If you had been in the crowd, why would you have been hesitant about this man's sudden change?**
 - **Why do you think making more room for people to belong sometimes feels threatening to people who already belong, like the crowd?**

STORY | When You Thought Jesus Was Too Good To Be True

- Before Jesus showed up, this guy was alone for most of his life. The people in the town didn't want to get near him. Everyone else tried to send this man away. But not Jesus. He wanted this man to be a part of a community and wants that for us, too. He wants us to feel like we belong. But when you have been alone for so long, I can imagine this would be hard to accept, and this is something I can relate to.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story about when the belonging you found in Jesus took time to sink in. Why was what Jesus offered difficult for you to accept? As you came to accept his friendship, what did this teach you about Jesus and yourself? How did you finally come to believe Jesus wanted you to belong? You can also invite a volunteer or teen to share their experience.*
- I found that when I felt alone and didn't belong, Jesus showed up for me like he did for this man living in the tombs and created a place to belong. At first, I was skeptical and unsure how it would all play out. Still, over time, I saw that Jesus never wavered, wanting me to belong, which began to overshadow my experiences of loneliness.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 34:17–20

- Jesus heard the cry of the man living in the tombs. When Jesus interacted with him, he didn't say, "You don't belong, you're scary, you can't be helped, and you deserve this." Jesus heard his cries and answered them. God has been hearing people's cries and helping them belong for years.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 34:17–20.*
- God hears us when we call him for help. When we listen to messages telling us we don't belong, can't be helped, and there isn't a place for us, we can cry out to God for help. God says, "I got this. I'm creating a space for you to belong with me and those who follow me."
- This Psalm shows us that God's got this and that the crushing ache of not belonging doesn't slip by God's notice. God sees that, too. And God cares for it because God cares for us. I hope you are seeing in the Psalms and the life of Jesus that **when you feel unwanted, God says you belong.**

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

OBJECT LESSON | Restart Button

- We can find a sense of belonging in lots of places: sports, music, and a Discord server. And that is all awesome, but the Bible shows us that the most profound sense of belonging is found in Jesus and the community who follows him. To belong to God, you don't have to dress a certain way, play a specific game, or do a unique *Fortnite* dance. All you have to do is say "yes" to a relationship with Jesus. Here are a few ways to experience belonging with Jesus this week.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, set up the restart button you decided to use throughout this series. Head to the "Restart Button Object Lesson" module in Week One for suggestions on how to build a restart button for this module. At the end of this teaching section, hit the restart button. As you are teaching, say ...*
 - **LOOK AT WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT YOU:** When we say yes to Jesus, just like he did for the man at the tombs, he changes our story. This week, trust that who Jesus says you are, not what you've done or who you were before, matters most. Maybe you want to trust what Jesus says about you for the first time. It is pretty simple — just tell Jesus you trust him and are sorry for all the lies you have believed about yourself. If you prayed that today, be courageous and tell one of the adult leaders here about it
 - **LOOK FOR A FRIEND:** When we step into that belonging God created for us, we realize that God invited others to belong, too. This week, pursue friendships with people who remind you that you belong and be open to expanding your friendships to make space for more people to belong.
 - **LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS:** This week, pay attention to the people around you who may be experiencing similar things to what he did. Just like Jesus was on the lookout for this man, we, too, can be on the lookout for others who have been pushed aside and unwanted and create a place for them to belong because **when you feel unwanted, God says you belong.**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - *What does it feel like when you have a true sense of belonging? What advice would you give to someone trying to help others belong?
 - *What are some reasons you have a hard time believing you have a place to belong with God? What's one thing you can do to address that today?

REFLECTION | What's Your Avatar?

- If you have ever played a game, you most likely have made an avatar. When you make one, you tell other gamers who you are and what you have experienced. What if we did the same thing for each other here?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this reflection, you'll need [the handout for this week's teaching](#), some Sharpies, colored pencils, markers, and any other art supplies you think would help people create their avatars. Set up a few drawing stations around the room. To reflect, have the group think about the aspects of themselves that they want to be known, their experiences that have made them feel the opposite, and their gifts to help build community. Have them write or draw these things on their avatar, and then talk to God about what they wrote. After a while, invite them to share their avatars with an adult volunteer or trusted friend.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups.*
 - Read John 15:15. Jesus calls his followers "friends." How does knowing you are called the friend of Jesus change the way you see yourself as belonging to God?
 - Today, what's one change you can make to trust that when you feel unwanted, God says you belong?

PRAAYER| Belong, Prayer, And Connection

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this prayer time, you will need poster boards and markers. Before your program, put a single grade on each poster board. Before you begin praying, have adult volunteers spread out around the room with signs with grade levels. Invite the group to break out based on grade. Have a few adult volunteers at each grade pray for their group of teenagers to experience belonging. You may also invite them to find someone in their group to pray for. After they are done praying, have adult volunteers collect the names and contact info of everyone who showed up in their group and encourage them to write students in their group once a week for a month. Whether it's text, email, group text, or even a card in the mail, customize this communication that best works for your group and coincides with your church's communication policies.*
- God wants you to experience community and to know you are loved, valued, and wanted. God has been welcoming people and creating belonging for thousands of years and is not stopping now. We're offered a restart, which means **when you feel unwanted, God says you belong.**