

WEEK 4
LESSON GUIDE

FROM
NOW ON

BIG IDEA

From now on,
Jesus gives you a place to belong.

BIBLE

1 Corinthians 12:12–31,
3:1-5, 21–23

ABOUT THIS WEEK

If you're like most people, you know what it's like to want to be included in a relationship. This week, we'll look at a story from Jesus' life when he chose to invite and include an unexpected group of people. **As we see in the way that Christ has established His church... from now on, Jesus gives you a place to belong.**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

POLL | Step In, Step Out

- This is the last week of our series, *From Now On!* We have been discussing Jesus and having honest conversations about who he is and why that matters to us.
- Often, when we come to a place like church, we see people we know and automatically feel connected and known. Maybe it's your first time, and it takes all your courage to walk in. Or perhaps you have been coming for years but may not feel like anyone knows you. No matter where you are on that spectrum, let's get a sense of who is in the room right now. So, if you are feeling courageous, let's try something.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this poll, have the group stand in a circle facing each other. If a statement is read and it applies, have them step forward. After a few seconds, have everyone step out and repeat this with a new question. Set a few ground rules for this activity. It is a quiet activity, which means no talking or laughing throughout. People deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, particularly when something requires vulnerability. There's no pressure. No one should feel they need to reveal anything about themselves they don't want to. Choose some statements that work for your group's culture and will help them see how similar and different they are. Here are a few to get your imagination going. Say, "Step into the circle if you..."*
 - *play a sport*
 - *traveled to a country that speaks a language other than English*
 - *have been picked on in school*
 - *are a leader*
 - *have a step-parent*
 - *have broken someone's heart*
 - *had your heart broken*
 - *have caught yourself judging someone before you even met them*
 - *like Fruity Pebbles*
 - *have been picked last in games or sports or left out of activity altogether*
 - *had dinner at the Olive Garden*
 - *know someone with a disability you cannot see*
 - *have been told you shouldn't cry*

- *felt alone or unwelcome*
- *felt pressure from your friends or an adult to do something you didn't want to do and regretted it later*
- *stood by and watched while someone was hurt and said nothing because you were scared*
- *like mint chocolate chip ice cream*
- *were raised by a single-parent*
- *know someone who has a physical or developmental disability*
- We're all unique. We all have different things to offer to the world and each other. As we follow Jesus, we want to make room for everyone to belong. We don't have to be the same to share the same faith. But these differences might create some conflict. With so many different people and experiences, what does it look like to connect and belong?

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

SCRIPTURE | 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

- When the Early Church started, one of the hallmarks of their community was creating belonging for marginalized people everywhere they went. This included wealthy and influential cities like the ancient Greek city of Corinth. In the first century, Corinth was a robust city with all the cultural offerings anyone would want. People here often made choices primarily focused on themselves and what they wanted. So, imagine some of the challenges when figuring out how to follow Jesus together. Let's look at what an Early Church leader named Paul wrote about creating belonging in a highly individualized community like Corinth.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or Paraphrase 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.*
- Paul is comparing the uniqueness of individuals in the church to different parts of the body. All body parts are different and have different functions, but they all work together and are all needed.
 - Let's unpack this image. Take an elbow, for example. We need elbows to move our arms and pick things up. We need our elbows to hug and bend our arms so we can itch our noses. But can you imagine if we had an entire body only made of elbows? That 100% wouldn't work out very well. We need elbows, but to function well, we need much more than elbows.
 - We need noses, eyes, feet, knees, livers, ears, kidneys, fingers, stomachs, hearts, and so many more parts of the body to be healthy. Our bodies can function in healthy ways because of the unique parts of the body and how they work together. A brain can't work without a heart. A finger doesn't work without the hand. It is all connected.
- Paul is reminding the church in Corinth to celebrate their uniqueness and to find unity within that diversity. The church is the most beautiful reflection of the love of Jesus when everyone lives into their identity and gifts and works together in the mission of God. In a divided society where we typically put ourselves first, both then and now, this is so important to remember! Everyone is needed and has a part to play, yet no one is supposed to journey alone.

IMAGE | The Cathedral Tree

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Find images of Redwood trees like [this picture](#). Show this on the screen. As you talk about the circles of Redwoods, show this [second image](#) when the teacher starts explaining clusters of trees. These images are free for you to use under the [Unsplash license](#).*
- The Redwood trees are massive giant trees in California whose branches reach hundreds of feet up and seem to touch the sky. But here's the most unbelievable part—their roots only grow down *ten to thirteen feet* below the ground. That doesn't seem deep enough for these trees to grow 400 feet. So how do they stand firm and not topple over? Their roots spread 60 to 80 feet and intertwine with other tree roots. They hold each other up.
- Sometimes, Redwoods grow in circles of trees. Scientists believe hundreds of years ago, one tree grew in the middle of a formation like this. It fell, but it didn't die. The stump sent sprouts that grew in a circle around the original tree's location. The original stump is long gone, but these trees remain. They are interwoven and provide strength for one another. This type of formation is called a cathedral, which, interestingly enough, is another name for a church or a sacred gathering space.
- This is a picture of the church today. We may not be able to see Jesus physically, but when he ascended into heaven, he scattered sprouts and gave us the Holy Spirit to help us grow. But here's the thing. We aren't

meant to follow Jesus in isolation. We need each other. We need to intertwine our roots and hold each other up. When we do this, it's sacred. It's life as God intends it to be.

- We need God, and we need each other. You are needed here. You are loved with all your uniquenesses, flaws, quirks, and gifts. **When you say yes to following Jesus, He offers us a place to belong. From now on, Jesus gives you a place to belong.**

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

REFLECTION | Friends Like Redwoods

- We all need a place to belong, and sometimes, we look for belonging in areas that aren't sustainable. That may look like intertwining your life with root systems that can't hold you up—or investing in friends who are causing you to feel insecure more often than they encourage you. Here are a few ways to start pursuing relationships that hold each other up, like the redwoods.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this reflection, print [the handout included in this week's series](#) materials and something to write with. Teach the bullet points below. Then, give teenagers time to reflect by encouraging them to think about the people holding them up and who they are holding up.
 - **BE A GOOD FRIEND:** We need good friends who see our uniqueness and create space for us to belong. But we also need to be that friend to other people. Name a few people you can support and encourage this week.
 - **SURROUND YOURSELF WITH GOOD FRIENDS:** Who are the friends who make you feel like the best version of yourself? Who are the friends that point you to Jesus? If those aren't the friends you currently have, think of someone you respect that you'd like to get to know. Write down the names of friends that can strengthen you moving forward, and prioritize hanging out with them this week.
 - **FIND A MENTOR AND BE A MENTOR:** Good friends our age are crucial to following Jesus, but so is the support and guidance of trusted adults who can share their wisdom and experiences with us. Is there someone whose walk with Jesus you find inspiring? Reach out to them this week and schedule a time to ask them questions. Just like Jesus welcomed little kids, look for opportunities to volunteer and care for people younger than you and talk to God about what you learned.

DISCUSSION

OPTIONAL SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY | From Now On Bracelet Or Keychain

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this reflection, you will need [bracelet cords](#) in multiple colors and a [bead with a tree](#). Before your program, be sure your adult volunteers know how to tie a sliding knot like this one. Before you begin the response, pass out a bracelet and corresponding bead to each teen. As you talk, invite them to start making their bracelets. If someone does not make a bracelet, the string can be turned into a keychain by ordering [these](#). Have those who missed the previous weeks give them what they need to make an entire bracelet.
- As you put the tree bead on, think about how Jesus wants you to belong with all your uniqueness and how Jesus has designed us to intertwine our lives. From now on, when you are feeling lonely, remember God gives you a place to belong.