

Connected: Created to Belong

Module 1: What Does It Mean to Belong?

This curriculum is all about God's grace and mercy. It is about an open-ended invitation to a full life. Jesus invited us into God's kingdom. He offered us new identities in him. Jesus taught and lived what it means to belong to God and invited everyone to come and follow him.

This module will ask your students to reflect on their identities in Christ, to consider their places in the kingdom, to grow in their character and faith, and to explore how they can invite others into this life.

In lesson 1, **A New Teacher and New Lessons**, students will understand identity in the context of Jesus' teaching. As a community you will explore how you can encourage and increase belonging.

In lesson 2, **Adoption Not Foster Care**, your community will explore the idea that God's plans are not a temporary place to stay safe and not get into trouble, but that his kingdom is a lifelong and eternal journey with him.

Lesson 3, **You Own It and You Are It**, is all about owning your true identity. As you become a part of God's kingdom, you reap the benefits of being in an active relationship with him, but you also gain the responsibility of sharing that life and that love with the world.

Lesson 4, **The Doors Are Always Open**, speaks to our own invitation and the invitation we can provide to others. Jesus is having a cosmic, eternal celebration and we are invited. We need to see the pure joy we will experience as we enter God's kingdom.

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Module 1: What Does It Mean to Belong?

Lesson 1: A New Teacher and New Lessons

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- trust in Jesus' plan and teaching found in the Bible
- understand that all are welcome and invited into the kingdom

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- articulate the big picture of Jesus' plan
- see that Jesus' plan includes everyone being invited into God's story, kingdom and family
- map the character changes of Peter

Materials Needed

- 1 cardboard square per student (thicker is better)
- 1 Sharpie marker per student
- 1 Bible per 4 students [teaching tip 7]
- 3 Post-it Notes per 4 students
- 2 large sheets of chart paper:
 - write title "Peter: Before" on the first sheet
 - write title "Peter: After" on the second sheet
- Tape to hang chart paper
- 1 copy of Appendix B per student
- 1 pen per student
- 1 sheet of paper per student

Minds On (approx. 15 min.)

Before and After:

Leader's note: Keep this activity fun and light this time. See Appendix A for visuals — this will be a fun version.

1. Have students think of something fun that they've learned to do (e.g., ice skate).
2. On the first side of their cardboard squares, instruct them to write "Before" as a title and then write how they learned next to it (e.g., "Before: Skating Class").
3. Ask students to write what they couldn't do before under the title (e.g., "I couldn't skate.")
4. Have them flip over the cardboard and write "After" as a second title and add the same subtitle (e.g., "After: Skating Class").

5. Instruct them to write an example of what they can do now because of that learning experience (e.g., “I can skate backward and stop on a dime”).
6. Have students share their before and after.

Ask: [teaching tip 4] What is it about learning something that helps us belong?

Suggested answer: After learning to skate you can call yourself a skater. It gives you an identity.

Leader’s note: Feel free to share a light and funny story about something you learned.

Ask: What is it about the teachings of Jesus and the disciples that help us to belong and give us an identity?

Action

Peter’s Before and After: (approx. 15 min.)

1. Divide students into groups of 3 or 4 by clustering them yourself.
2. Number each group in order.
3. The odd-numbered groups will look at Peter’s “before” struggles, when he was rash, violent and in denial: John 18:7–17, 25–26.
4. The even-numbered groups will look at Peter’s life “after” when he was a revolutionary and brave leader: Acts 2:14–39.
5. Each group will list characteristics and choices that Peter made in their section.
6. Each group will choose the top 3 and write each on a Post-it Note. Have a representative post them on the corresponding chart paper.
7. After giving them time to work in groups, bring everyone back together and compare these 2 times in Peter’s life.

Prompt: Notice that Peter’s new understanding changed his identity. In fact, he doesn’t stop there; he wants to share this new understanding with others. However, sometimes it’s hard to know how to learn to follow Jesus and belong to him. Maybe trying to figure that out in our own words will help us along the way.

Peter Proclaims Provocative Proofs: (approx. 20 min.)

1. Explain that the group is going to look at how Peter changed and found a powerful belonging in being a Christian.
2. Have a volunteer read Acts 2:36–40.

Prompt: The Bible sometimes words things differently than we do today. Unless you are from a church background — and even if you are — you might have a hard time understanding some of the terms in these verses.

Reword:

1. Give each student a copy of Appendix B.
2. Have students circle any terms they don’t use in day-to-day conversation (e.g., Lord, Messiah, repent, baptized, forgiveness of sins, receive the Holy Spirit).
3. Ask students to describe those terms with everyday language.
4. Have 4 or 5 students share a term they circled and attempted to reword.

Prompt: The Bible wasn't originally written in our modern English. It can't really be word-for-word translated. It was written over 2,000 years ago and much has changed since then. What we can do is interpret and paraphrase and use our best descriptions to talk about what it means and describe it accurately. From this passage, we see that inviting others is what Peter values in belonging to Jesus.

Consolidate/Debrief

Have a volunteer read Acts 2:42–47 [teaching tip 6].

Prompt: Peter shared this new understanding with his audience to help shape their identity. That same challenge is available to us today.

Have students find a space by themselves to quietly reflect on the following questions:

1. Just as Peter had a “before and after” comparison, how do you see Jesus’ impact on your own “before and after”?
2. Do you find belonging in Jesus’ teaching?

If students want, they can have a paper and pen to write down thoughts.

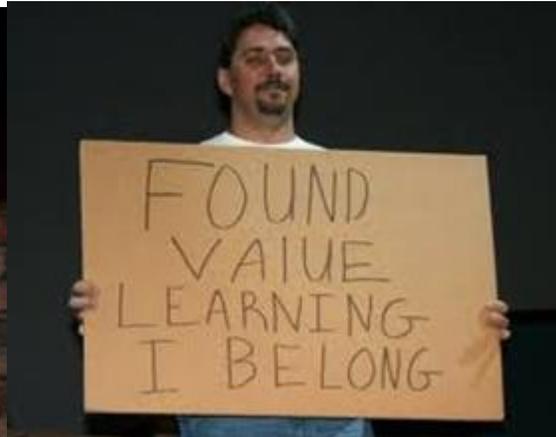
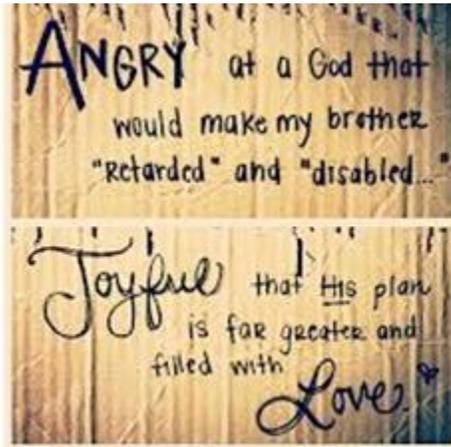
Leader’s note: Give about 3 minutes of silence in between the 2 questions.

Prompt: In him we learn, in him we build friendships, in him we give thanks and share every good thing and in him we connect to God who gives us life and this new life together. (You can rephrase this as a group and come up with your own version.)

Take prayer requests and affirmations.

To conclude, come up with a ritual or prayer time that reflects the group and the lesson. Remember the 4 components of community (teaching, fellowship, the Lord’s Supper and prayer).

Appendix A: Before and After Examples



Appendix B: Acts 2:36–40 (NIV)

³⁶ “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” ³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

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Module 1: What Does It Mean to Belong?

Lesson 2: Adoption Not Foster Care

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- accept God's adoption of them
- grow or strengthen a positive view and value of fellowship and belonging to the body
- develop true community

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- know that community is valuable and enjoyable
- distinguish that belonging to Jesus isn't just a "when it is easy and feels good" type of community

Materials Needed

- 2 sheets of chart paper
- 2 markers
- Tape for hanging chart paper
- 1 sheet of paper per 3 students
- 1 pen per 3 students
- 1 Bible per 3 students [teaching tip 7]
- Sharpies or paint in a variety of colours (enough for all to share)
- Wooden board or frame-able cardboard (large enough that everyone can help out)
- 1 copy of Appendix C per student
- Recording paper and pen

Minds On (approx. 10 min.)

Leader's note: Real life fostering and adoption are sensitive issues. Prepare your leaders to respond accordingly and to keep an eye on those who come from that context. If applicable, refer to your church's child protection policy on how to handle sensitive topic situations.

Prompt: Before we get started, let's talk quickly about social media and friendship. Social media is cool, fun and a great place to explore and connect. But it does not replace or even come close to being together in real life. With that said, we're going to be looking at the idea of the perfect hangout.

Divide the group in half by giving each person a number (i.e., 1 or 2). All the 1s will gather together to brainstorm about the perfect hangout, while all the 2s will gather together to consider obstacles to the perfect hangout.

Group 1 — Brainstorming the Perfect Hangout:

1. Have the group plan a night of perfect hanging out. Suggested considerations can include:
 - What food, fun and activities would they have?
 - What would they want to do if time, travel, or money were not barriers?
2. Have them write the perfect hangout plan on their chart paper.

Leader's note: Consider implementing their plan (or parts of it) in the ministry year.

Group 2 — Obstacles to the Perfect Hangout

1. Have the group describe some things that get in the way of hanging out. Suggested considerations include:
 - What breaks up friendships?
 - What keep people away from youth nights or special events?
2. Have them write down the top 5 answers on their chart paper.

After 5 minutes, bring everyone back to the large group. Post the 2 charts.

Action (approx. 30 min.)

“Markings” Brainstorm:

1. Cluster students in groups of 3.
2. Give each group a piece of paper and pen.
3. Have each group designate 1 person to be the writer and 2 people to read and brainstorm.
4. Instruct each group to read Romans 1:1–17.
5. Give the brainstormers 2 minutes to look at the passage and list “markings” (i.e., tangible examples) of family, community and belonging. [suggested answers: thankfulness for others, remembering others, give to others, encourage each other]
6. Afterwards, they will choose their top 5. Each of them will also choose 1 for themselves.

Family Banner:

1. Together as a group, make a poster or a more permanent sign. Hand out Appendix C to students to show examples.
2. Each person will contribute his or her marking from the previous activity (as an image or as a word) to the sign.

Leader's note: The Family Banner activity may feel very chaotic. There may be a student who takes initiative and directs the project. Otherwise, be prepared to facilitate but not direct the project. Also, keep an eye out for students who don't seem to be participating. Gently encourage them to add their markings.

Consolidate/Debrief

Have a volunteer read Acts 2:42–47.

As a large group, have the students generate a quick to-do list of practical ways they can demonstrate and understand belonging during this module. Write their ideas on your preferred recording paper.

Pray, "In him we learn, in him we build friendships, in him we give thanks and share every good thing and in him we connect to God who gives us life and this new life together."

Appendix C: Family Banner Examples



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Module 1: What Does It Mean to Belong?

Lesson 3: You Own It and You Are It

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- own the access that they have to God's presence and the kingdom
- build each person up in their gifts and/or character

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- define content and context to what it means to be the body of Christ from 1 Corinthians 12
- identify character traits of spiritual gifts and godly love
- assess some of the gifts God has given them

Materials Needed

- Scavenger hunt items
- 1 copy of Appendix D per student
- 1 pen per student
- 1 copy of Appendix E per student
- 2 sheets of chart paper and markers
- Recording paper and pen
- Optional: Small prizes for winning team
- Minimum 1 Post-it Note per student

Minds On

What on Earth?:

1. Challenge your students to work individually or in small groups [teaching tip 15] to find as many different elements of earth as possible. Provide Appendix D as a scavenger hunt checklist.
2. After 15 minutes, gather students back together to debrief.

Leader's notes: You can amend Appendix D, adding your own planted items or using what is already in your environment. Make the scavenger hunt as big or as small as you want. If you need more instructions on setting up a scavenger hunt go to: www.scavenger-hunt-guru.com/plan-a-scavenger-hunt.html.

Prompt: As humans, the Bible says we have inherited the earth. That is a huge blessing and something that we should never take for granted!

Ask: What you think inheritance means? (Get 5 to 10 answers.)

Action

Prompt: We talked about inheriting the earth when we looked at the things gathered during the scavenger hunt — but being a part of God’s family brings an even better inheritance! We are about to dive into the Bible to see what we gain from being in God’s family. Hopefully these passages will help us see what our spiritual inheritance is.

Gifts Galore: (approx. 15 min.)

1. Divide your group in 2 by numbering each person (i.e., 1 or 2). Give each person a copy of Appendix E and a pen.
2. When you say “go”, each student will read the passage on his or her own.
3. Next, both groups need to work together to list all the items found in the passage that we inherit because we are in God’s family. Have 1 person from each group write all the answers on chart paper.
4. Suggest to the other team members that they underline the items on their own handouts.
5. After 5 minutes compare both lists and come up with a final list on the recording paper.

Optional: You can make this into a race and give small prizes to the team with the most items found.

What’s the Use?: (approx. 15 min.)

1. Using the list that the large group created together in Gifts Galore, identify people in the group or friends and family that fit the gift characteristics.
2. Write each person’s name on a Post-it and place it next to that gift. There can be multiple people for each item. Students can also write their own names.

Leader’s notes: The gifts listed in the passage are spiritual gifts that God has entrusted with Christians. While students may not know if they have a particular gift, they may have an inclination that God has helped them to see. Have our leaders keep track of which names are being listed. Encourage them to participate and mention the names of students who have not yet been listed.

Ask: How can this list inspire you to belong even more and share with others about how they can belong? Do you think these gifts strengthen belonging?

Consolidate/Debrief

Think/Pair/Share: [teaching tip 2] Choose 1 gift that you want to develop and list 3 ways you can work on it this week.

Pray, “In him we learn, in him we build friendships, in him we give thanks and share every good thing and in him we connect to God who gives us life and this new life together.”

Appendix D: What on Earth?

	A plant		Something light
	A mineral		Something natural to eat
	A liquid		Something bizarre
	A gas		Something mysterious
	An animal		An old invention
	Something shiny		A new invention
	Something rough		Something awesome
	Something heavy		Something that inspires you

Appendix E: 1 Corinthians 12 (TLB)

And now, brothers, I want to write about the special abilities the Holy Spirit gives to each of you, for I don't want any misunderstanding about them. ²You will remember that before you became Christians you went around from one idol to another, not one of which could speak a single word. ³But now you are meeting people who claim to speak messages from the Spirit of God. How can you know whether they are really inspired by God or whether they are fakes? Here is the test: no one speaking by the power of the Spirit of God can curse Jesus, and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," and really mean it, unless the Holy Spirit is helping him.

⁴Now God gives us many kinds of special abilities, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. ⁵There are different kinds of service to God, but it is the same Lord we are serving. ⁶There are many ways in which God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work in and through all of us who are his. ⁷The Holy Spirit displays God's power through each of us as a means of helping the entire church.

⁸To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; someone else may be especially good at studying and teaching, and this is his gift from the same Spirit. ⁹He gives special faith to another, and to someone else the power to heal the sick. ¹⁰He gives power for doing miracles to some, and to others power to prophesy and preach. He gives someone else the power to know whether evil spirits are speaking through those who claim to be giving God's messages — or whether it is really the Spirit of God who is speaking. Still another person is able to speak in languages he never learned; and others, who do not know the language either, are given power to understand what he is saying. ¹¹It is the same and only Holy Spirit who gives all these gifts and powers, deciding which each one of us should have.

¹²Our bodies have many parts, but the many parts make up only one body when they are all put together. So it is with the "body" of Christ. ¹³Each of us is a part of the one body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But the Holy Spirit has fitted us all together into one body. We have been baptized into Christ's body by the one Spirit, and have all been given that same Holy Spirit.

¹⁴Yes, the body has many parts, not just one part. ¹⁵If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And what would you think if you heard an ear say, "I am not part of the body because I am only an ear and not an eye"? Would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷Suppose the whole body were an eye — then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything?

¹⁸ But that isn't the way God has made us. He has made many parts for our bodies and has put each part just where he wants it. ¹⁹ What a strange thing a body would be if it had only one part! ²⁰ So he has made many parts, but still there is only one body.

²¹ The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

²² And some of the parts that seem weakest and least important are really the most necessary. ²³ Yes, we are especially glad to have some parts that seem rather odd! And we carefully protect from the eyes of others those parts that should not be seen,²⁴ while of course the parts that may be seen do not require this special care. So God has put the body together in such a way that extra honor and care are given to those parts that might otherwise seem less important. ²⁵ This makes for happiness among the parts, so that the parts have the same care for each other that they do for themselves.²⁶ If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

²⁷ Now here is what I am trying to say: All of you together are the one body of Christ, and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it. ²⁸ Here is a list of some of the parts he has placed in his Church, which is his body:

Apostles,
Prophets — those who preach God's Word,
Teachers,
Those who do miracles,
Those who have the gift of healing;
Those who can help others,
Those who can get others to work together,
Those who speak in languages they have never learned.

²⁹ Is everyone an apostle? Of course not. Is everyone a preacher? No. Are all teachers? Does everyone have the power to do miracles? ³⁰ Can everyone heal the sick? Of course not. Does God give all of us the ability to speak in languages we've never learned? Can just anyone understand and translate what those are saying who have that gift of foreign speech? ³¹ No, but try your best to have the more important of these gifts.

First, however, let me tell you about something else that is better than any of them!

Connected: Created to Belong

Module 1: What Does It Mean to Belong?

Lesson 4: The Doors Are Always Open

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- place belonging and invitation side-by-side
- acknowledge the importance of Jesus' invitation and their need to share that invitation with others
- be responsible for their own journeys and understand that they are in process on a continual adventure with Christ
- pray for God's guidance and will

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- present reasons why many came to faith in Acts 2
- differentiate why some come to faith today and why others don't

Materials Needed

- 2 party plans (see Pre-Lesson Preparation and I'm Having a Party activity for details)
- Bible [teaching tip 7]
- 1 sheet of chart paper per 4 students
- 1 pen per student

Pre-Lesson Preparation

- Choose 2 leaders to come up with their own individual party plans. Make sure the party plans are very different from each other.

Minds On

I'm Having a Party: (approx. 15 min.)

1. Without identifying who wrote them, share the 2 different party plans with students.
2. Ask them to think about which party they would want to attend and why.
3. After 30 seconds, have the students vote by moving to the left side of your space for the first party or to the right side for the second party. No one can remain in the middle.
4. Ask 3 or 4 students to share their reasons.
5. Reveal who planned the parties. Ask them to consider whether they want to change their votes. Allow everyone to move to the party they wish to attend now.

Ask: How did the host affect your decision in attending which party to go to? What if we substituted other types of people, like a convicted criminal or your dream date?

Prompt: Sometimes we are only concerned about what we will be doing and other times we do things to please others or to try and fit in with what is perceived as “cool”. But the most important part of belonging is who is inviting us and why!

Action (approx. 30 min.)

Have a volunteer read Acts 2:42–47.

Placemat:

1. Divide students into groups of 4.
2. Number each group in order.
3. Give each group 1 sheet of chart paper and every student a pen.
4. Each group will draw a medium-sized circle in the middle of their paper, then 4 lines dividing the rest of the paper in 4 sections. Each student should have a section of the paper in front of them on which to write. (see Appendix A as a reference)
5. Both from the passage and their own understanding, the odd-numbered groups will write reasons why people (during the times of Acts 2 and today) would come into the family. [suggested answers: sense of belonging, being part of something bigger than themselves, willingness to follow Jesus] Even-numbered groups will write reasons why people would not come into the family. [suggested answers: too hard to do, didn't want to follow Jesus, wanted to keep their things to themselves, undecided]
6. Give students 2 minutes to write in their assigned sections.
7. When they are done writing, rotate the page a quarter-turn clockwise.
8. Each student will comment on what was written previously (e.g., new ideas from what they read, check mark to agree, a circle to disagree). They will have 1 minute to comment.
9. Continue steps 6 to 7 for 2 more rounds.
10. Give each group 5 minutes to decide on the top 5 reasons. They can write these reasons in the middle circle of their chart paper.
11. Have a spokesperson share their results with the large group.

Prompt: For those of us who consider ourselves Christians, it is our desire for others to come into relationship with Jesus. He calls us into prayer for wisdom and strength to love. We are called to invite all who we come in contact with, with no guarantees that they will accept.

Ask: Now we are going to pray for God to be with us. What do you think we need to pray for?

You can ask students to pray for specific items mentioned or for people, or that your group would help people become a part of the family. Pray for people who are in need, lonely or hurting to come and join you. Use discretion for whether you need a group prayer time or individual prayer time.

Ask (after prayer): Do you feel part of the family? Do you feel that you belong? Why or why not?

Prompt: I want to offer you an opportunity to be invited in. Jesus often asked people to come and follow him, and we are asking that tonight! Come and follow Jesus with us, together. Come

and be a part of this. Start talking to Jesus and praying, start sharing in his kingdom, accept being invited and invite others. Accept God's great love for you and share it with others.

Consolidate/Debrief

Pray again saying thanks for what God has done and what God is going to do. Thank him that we belong to him and there is nothing we can do to break that love he has for us.

Pray the following commitment to God based on Acts 2:42–47. You can adjust the wording as necessary.

Because We Belong:

- May we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching and sharing the stories and wisdom of Jesus and the Bible as well as the stories of God at work in our lives.
- May we devote ourselves to fellowship and real friendship.
- May we devote ourselves to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), eating and sharing and giving thanks.
- May we devote to ourselves to prayer, talking to God, our Father in heaven, and Jesus, our brother and friend.
- May we have a deep sense of awe, be expectant and be ready for God to do wonders in us and through us.
- May we be together and share all we have, being generous to the point of sacrifice.
- May we do this daily, at home, at church, at school and wherever we go.
- May we worship and praise while we go.
- May God lead us and draw others to his family and inspire us to invite others.
- May we give thanks to God through Jesus for all things.
- May we keep praying and living out God's blessing to one another and the world around us! Amen.

Leader's note: If you are using the entire curriculum in sequence, this lesson should segue into the rest of the modules by saying there is lots more we can learn about belonging, what God has done to help us belong and what we can do to help others belong. Show excitement about the rest of the year and close by reaffirming that it is in real relationship with Jesus and God's true family that we connect and find ultimate belonging.

APPENDIX A

