

Connected: Created to Belong

Module 2: You're Invited!

God's ultimate invitation is to follow him and be in relationship with him. This module unpacks various things we are invited to participate in: following Christ; being together; practising community; and practising hospitality. The main idea throughout this module is **belonging to believe — not believing in order to belong**. Having a true understanding of our invitation to belong is what spurs on belief. If students feel welcomed, included and loved, the believing becomes another expression of their journeys towards Christ. How thrilling to walk alongside them in this process!

In lesson 1, **Invitation to Follow**, we see that following Jesus is different than clicking a button to follow our friends on Facebook or Twitter. While they may provide connection when we're on our own, how about the actual practice of being in the same room as one another?

In lesson 2, **Invitation to Be Together**, students learn how to be with the people who are present and learn about them in more intentional ways.

In lesson 3, we unpack community with **Invitation to Practise Community**. Community can be great — but it can also be awkward! It takes work and intentionality to develop community; especially when all types of people are welcomed into the fold. Addressing community and its potential for awkwardness, we can move past this into the deep goodness, joy, support and ability it has to enable growth in people. Looking at how the early church did things and how we can translate that to our practice today, we make this vision real for our current context.

In lesson 4, **Invitation to Practise Hospitality**, we have a party! The leaders and volunteers get to host a party for their youth, modelling hospitality and chatting about what makes a great celebration. Who does God invite to his celebrations? Is anyone left out?

Leader's note: If you read ahead to lesson 4 and have time to plan in more depth, this is a good opportunity to involve other groups in the church to create a multi-generational experience for the youth. Consider inviting other groups to host the party and then involve them in the rest of the discussion and learning.

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Module 2: You're Invited!

Lesson 1: Invitation to Follow

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- understand what it could look like to follow Jesus in their own lives
- recognize that he is our friend and not a power over them
- have a deeper desire to follow him in their everyday lives
- grasp that Jesus knows them personally — he made them; he gets them; they're not just on his list of "friends"
- know that they can give Jesus their burdens in exchange for rest

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- identify the reasons they choose to follow something or a person
- be able to reflect on and state what Jesus promises us in our journeys with him

Materials Needed

- Appendix A (see Minds On to determine how many copies you need, depending on the size of your group)
- 1 pair of scissors
- 1 roll of masking tape
- Optional: Soup cans
- Alarm (i.e., an object that makes a loud sound that students can hear from farther away, such as a hand drum, tambourine, megaphone, etc.)
- Small prizes for winning team (e.g., candy, gum, etc.) [teaching tip 5]
- 1 sheet of chart paper — divided into 2 columns, titled "Follow" and "Not Follow"
- 1 marker
- 1 copy of Appendix B per student
- 1 coloured pen or pencil crayon per student
- 1 Post-it Note per student

Pre-Lesson Preparation

- Set up the scavenger hunt described in Minds On. The materials are in Appendix A — print as many copies as you think you will need and cut them apart. Tape or hide signs discreetly around the space you have chosen for the hunt. Some can be completely hidden or half showing, depending on how challenging you want it to be.

Minds On

Prompt: In a moment, we will divide into groups. We will have a scavenger hunt and attempt to “follow” as many “people” as possible, like we do on social media. You will be looking for Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest and Instagram logos. Whoever comes back with the most logos in 5 minutes wins!

Scavenger Hunt:

1. Determine the boundaries of the hunt.
2. Divide students into groups of 4 or 5 by giving them a number (total number of students divided by 5).
3. Designate a meeting spot for each group.
4. Play the alarm or sound that will let them know when time is up, so they are familiar with it.
5. Ask students to repeat the instructions:
 - a. Reiterate the boundaries they are to stay within.
 - b. Meet with their groups in the designated spots.
 - c. Together they will find as many of the 4 different logos as possible.
 - d. When they hear the alarm, they return to their designated spot.
6. Release students to the activity.
7. Sound the alarm after 5 minutes.
8. Tally up the logos and determine the winners.
9. Provide the winning group with a small prize.

Leader’s note: The object of the game is to gather the most papers in a short amount of time, making a frenzy in the space and causing students to feel drained or tired. If you would like to add to the challenge, tape the images to soup cans (or similar heavy objects). Have groups collect them in a strong bag, causing the load to be heavier as they collect “followers”. This Minds On will help students to consider the number of people they “follow” (likely subconsciously) on social media and will get them thinking about why they follow them in the first place.

Action

Ask: In the last activity, the goal was to follow as many “people” as possible through various social medias. It’s so easy to do with a click of a button online, but are we actually real friends with all of these people? Do we even know much about them?

Think/Pair/Share: [teaching tip 2] What are reasons why you would “follow” someone and reasons why you wouldn’t? Think of specific examples. Decide on 2 to 3 ideas in your pair that you will share with the group.

Leader’s note: Give students some ideas if necessary (e.g., Are they interesting, pretty, entertaining? Are they mean, rude, odd?).

Record their ideas on the chart paper or invite a student to write the ideas for the group. Sort the reasons into the “Follow” and “Not Follow” columns.

Prompt: We’ve listed a lot of interesting thoughts. Sometimes it’s easy to “follow” someone just because we can click a button and can erase that choice at any point. Today though, we’re going to consider what Jesus had to say when he invited people to follow him. It’s not as easy

as clicking a button to follow him, and once he's in our lives, it's hard to get rid of him! We're going to read about how Jesus invites us into his presence. It's a little different than clicking "invite".

Matthew 11:28–30:

1. Distribute a copy of Appendix B to each student as well as a coloured pen or pencil crayon.
2. Have a different student read each translation of Matthew 11:28–30 aloud to the group [teaching tip 6].
3. Students will circle or colour the words in each translation that are intriguing to them, that gives them comfort or even those that are confusing.
4. After about 5 minutes, have students share their observations and the words they identified with.
5. Write those observations on the same chart paper used earlier and see if a theme emerges.

Rate This Question:

1. Ask students to think about their answers to this question: How heavy does life feel sometimes? Rate between 1 and 5 (1 = very light and 5 = very heavy). Give them 1 minute to think of their answers.
2. Have students show their ratings with the number of corresponding fingers.

Ask: [teaching tip 4] Is this an invitation that appeals to you? Do you like the idea of rest? Are there areas of our lives that feel heavy — or like we can't manage on our own?

Leader's note: Give students time to process these questions before jumping in with prompts. Perhaps have a leader begin the conversation once you have waited about 3 minutes. If students do not want to speak aloud, invite them to write their thoughts on the backs of their Appendix B pages.

Consolidate/Debrief

Prompt: Sometimes, we "follow" so many people that we lose track and become heavy with "friends", but really know nothing about the majority of them. (If you used the soup cans earlier in the scavenger hunt, refer to the tangible weight of those "friends".) And sometimes, we are busy and feel heavy or overwhelmed with the amount we need to do. School can feel like a burden and homework just never seems to end. But Jesus wants to give us rest. He promises this to us and wants to spend time with us as a friend. When we follow him and begin to trust him, our burdens don't feel so overwhelming.

Pass around a pack of Post-it Notes and have each student take 1 sheet.

Prompt: Let's each write something that is weighing on us right now or that makes us feel heavy. You will pass it to the person to your right once you are finished. Let's pray as we go around the circle for the person whose Post-it you have received.

Leader's notes: If any students do not want to pray out loud, suggest they can pray silently and indicate when they are done with a gentle tap on the next person. If students aren't up for revealing their burdens to the person beside them, you can place all the Post-it Notes together

in the centre or on a wall. Have a leader pray over all of the burdens in the group to close your time together.

Appendix A: Scavenger Hunt Logos



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Instagram



Pinterest Pinterest Pinterest



Pinterest Pinterest Pinterest



Pinterest Pinterest Pinterest



Pinterest Pinterest Pinterest



Appendix B

Matthew 11:28–30 (MSG): ^{28–30} “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Matthew 11:28–30 (NRSV): ²⁸ “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28 (TLB): ²⁸ Come to me and I will give you rest — all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke — for it fits perfectly — and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls; for I give you only light burdens.”

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Module 2: You're Invited!

Lesson 2: Invitation to Be Together

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- understand that being with and belonging to God is safe and comforting; he will not let them down — he is constantly present with them
- really start to *know* one another, the people they are journeying with
- understand that God has equipped each of them with gifts and abilities that help them to support one another when they are together
- come away from their inclination to be independent or isolated when they see that what they have to offer is valuable to others

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- articulate ways of being with one another and ways of being with Jesus
- identify 1 or 2 gifts they have that can serve or impact another person or group
- learn what it takes to encourage one another and pray to God

Materials Needed

- 1 pen per student
- 3 slips of paper (large enough to write 1 sentence on them) per student
- 1 hat or toque (larger groups may use multiple hats)
- 1 copy of Appendix C per student
- 5 Post-it Notes per 2 students
- 1 Bible per student [teaching tip 7]
- Small votive candle on top of sand on a small plate
- Matches or lighter
- Optional: 1 cue card per student

Minds On

3 Facts in a Hat:

Leader's note: The idea of this activity is to get students to know one another better and to have them learn new facts about one another.

1. Each student writes 3 different facts about themselves (e.g., I play hockey; I like to camp; I have a rabbit) on their slips of paper. They can be simple facts, but encourage them not to be too obvious (e.g., I am wearing a blue hat).
2. Have students fold up their 3 separate papers and place them in the hat.

3. Mix up the papers in the hat.
4. Each student will pick out a fact and the entire group will guess who it belongs to.

Option for larger groups: If you have a large group, consider splitting into smaller groups and using multiple hats, so each student can get to know one another.

Option for smaller groups: If you have a smaller group (6 to 8 students), it's fun to play the game all together. If you want to make it competitive, keep score of who guesses the most correct answers.

Action

Prompt: Cool, that was great to get to know each of you a little better! Today, we're going to talk about being together and spending time with one another. God invites us to build friendships with each other and also to build a friendship with him. In order to do that, we have to get to know one another, and even more, we've got to get to know ourselves: what we're good at, what our strengths are, how we like to spend our time, etc. He wants in on all of the things in our lives, not just Sunday mornings or youth group!

Hand out Appendix C to each student and have everyone complete the survey.

Leader's note: The survey is meant to get students thinking about how they spend their time and what they are good at. No answer is wrong; it will just shed light on their comfort zones and help to identify new areas to step into or try.

Gather into a circle on the floor. Read the survey questions aloud and have each student vote by placing a foot into the centre or leaving it where it is. If their answer is "yes", a foot goes in. If not, the foot stays out. If their answer is "maybe", they can wiggle the foot. Let students know that it's okay if they do not want to share every answer.

Leader's note: If you want to record the answers on your own sheet to get a sense of where the group leans, it's a good way to start tracking their preferences.

Ask 4 students for their answers to what they are good at and best at (the question in the box).

Prompt: It sounds like we've been able to identify a few things: how we most like to spend our time and also what we tend to be good at or enjoy. The cool thing about God is that he delights in our strengths and helps us in the areas we don't feel so strong. He also made us to use what we are good at, but doesn't want us to do it alone all the time. He wants us to *invite* other people into our worlds.

Ask: How might you invite a friend into "your world" without it feeling like just 1 more thing to do? It doesn't have to be hard. It could be as simple as asking him or her to come to a basketball practice with you or going shopping together on the weekend.

Post-it Note Brainstorm:

1. Students will be given the "go ahead" after the instructions are given.
2. Have students choose their own partners for this activity.
3. They will brainstorm different ways to invite people into "their worlds".
4. Each pair will write 1 idea per Post-it Note.

5. Instruct students to post their ideas on the wall once they have 3 to 5 ideas.
6. After all the pairs have submitted their ideas, review what was written and group similar ideas together.

Prompt: Great ideas! So, as we can see, it can be easy to invite others into the things we are good at and connect with them. But what do we think about spending some of that time with God? How do we even do this? Is God going to join us on the basketball court? Will he hang out with us when we're doing our homework? Is it easy to let God in on our days? Let's hear what God says.

Scripture Reading:

1. Hand out Bibles.
2. Have students look up Isaiah 41:10 and Deuteronomy 31:8.
3. Read scripture aloud by inviting 2 different students to read each passage [teaching tip 6].

Ask: What does this scripture tell us about God? How does it speak about his character?

Suggested answers: God is strong, can be trusted, goes before us, he gives us strength

Prompt: Just as God desires for us to spend time together doing the things we love and serving others with the skills we have, he also wants time with you. He wants you to know his love. These verses promise that God is with us — always. How can we honour God with our time? What areas can we invite him into?

Think/Pair/Share: [teaching tip 2] How can we invite God into the things we spend our time on? Share with your partners.

Consolidate/Debrief

Prompt: Being together means that we get to know one another. And because of that, we can support one another in meaningful ways. If we choose to spend time with people and invite them into different things we do in our lives, we learn about them and can continue to encourage them as they go through life. When spending time with God, we'll learn that we can talk with him as we might talk with our friends.

I'm going to read you Romans 15:5–6 (NRSV): “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As we close today, we are going to encourage one another. We're also going to encourage God. The light in the middle represents God's light in our lives — his gentle, but consistent, strong presence in our lives. After we have gone around the room and encouraged one another, we can offer encouragements to God.

Leader's note: While prompting with the text above, light the candle in the middle of the room. It may feel awkward at first. Have a leader or yourself start the initial encouragements (e.g., “I encourage Luke to continue working hard at developing his love of robotics, knowing that he has a real gift in creativity.”). When it comes time to encourage God, also be the first to start. If you have newcomers, be extra observant about their personalities during Minds On. You can

note something they did during your group time or something you noticed about their nature. Perhaps, "I encourage Joey to continue being kind — I've noticed how friendly he is and I just met him!" You can also give general encouragement such as, "I encourage my new friend Amanda to invite a friend to an activity this week."

Alternate activity: if you have a large number of students or some who do not like to talk out loud, you can have cue cards available so that students may write words of encouragement to one another. Have each student write his or her name at the top of a card, and then put them in the centre on a table. Students can gather around and take turns writing little notes on each student's sheet. Have leaders watch for cards that aren't so full and fill them with kind words. You can then do the same for God — or encourage students to speak their words aloud to God, like a prayer.

Appendix C: Survey

Circle Y for “yes”, N for “no” or M for “maybe” to answer the following questions:

- Do you like to be around other people? Y N M
- Do you enjoy talking through things with your friends? Y N M
- Do you find yourself enjoying time spent alone? Y N M
- Do you go to your parents or siblings or other family members for help? Y N M
- Do you like to do things spontaneously? Y N M
- Do you like to have a plan? Y N M
- Do you find yourself dealing with issues on your own? Y N M
- Do you make extra time for other people in your life? Y N M
- Do you find it easy to share your things? Y N M
- Do you like to have good conversations? Y N M
- Do you enjoy being active and sharing in a game, sport or activity with others? Y N M

What do you think you are best at? What do you think you are good at?

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Module 2: You're Invited!

Lesson 3: Invitation to Practise Community

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- understand that God invites *all* people to be a part of his family and community — everyone is welcome no matter who they are, their background, colour, nationality, etc.
- accept God's invitation into something so much bigger than themselves: God's kingdom
- grasp how community can support their spiritual growth and health

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- identify different communities they belong to and others they would like to be a part of
- brainstorm ways to practise “one-anothers” in different of communities in their lives

Materials Needed

- Timer
- 1 copy of Appendix D per student (copy and cut in half)
- 1 pen per student
- 1 copy of Appendix E per student (can be cut apart for separate groups)
- 3 Bibles [teaching tip 7]
- 1 to 2 smooth stones or rocks per student (large enough to write phrase on — see Appendix F for samples), OR separate slips of paper if you don't have rocks
- 1 Sharpie marker per student (to write on stones)
- 2 to 3 copies of Appendix F for group to reference

Leader's note: For Action, there are 2 options. Prior to the lesson, decide which might best suit your group — a video clip or family pictures. The materials for the 2 options are listed below.

Option 1:

- Small bags of popcorn or similar snack ready to be distributed [teaching tip 5]
- Video equipment to watch “Community” clip: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iE8meUf0gCM (play until 2:40 min. mark) [teaching tip 1]

Option 2:

- 1 sheet of drawing paper per student
- Multiple colours of markers or pencil crayons for students to share
- Photo of your family
- A funny story of your family (leader's only)

Minds On

Human Knot Game:

1. Have everyone stand in a circle.
2. Then have each person hold out both of their hands to grab onto 2 other people's hands across from them. The goal is make a really twisted human knot of hands.
3. Set a timer to your choice for length of time — you can even do a few rounds at different lengths of time.
4. Keeping their hands held together at all times, have students work together as a team to untangle this knot.

Optional: Consider playing this game in gender-specific circles to avoid unwanted physical contact — or just keep an eye on your students to make sure everyone is comfortable and behaving appropriately in close quarters.

Leader's note: This game can be awkward, frustrating and annoying. That's the point! We are learning about community and being with other people. It isn't always easy and can often be frustrating and awkward. Communication is key in this game.

Prompt: Awesome work friends. It can be hard to be nice in these contexts, eh?

Ask: With a show of hands:

1. Did you find this game easy?
2. Did you find it challenging?
3. Was it awkward at times?
4. Can 1 or 2 people tell me why you thought it was awkward or easy or challenging?

Transition to your regular meeting space for the rest of the lesson.

Action**Option 1 — Clip to Example Community:**

Prompt: We're going to watch a short clip from the show "Community". Observe each person's character and their differences.

1. Hand out bags of popcorn or other snacks [teaching tip 5] to each student as a treat for doing a good job at the game and also to enjoy together while watching the clip.
2. Show the clip, stopping at 2:40 minutes (you really don't want for it to run longer because it will lose the meaning).

Ask: What were all of the differences in the characters that you noticed?

Have students "popcorn" their answers, saying them aloud like a quick brainstorm. There's no need to record their answers, just get them thinking about the makeup of the group in the clip.

Prompt: As you saw, community can be awkward, hard and frustrating at times. But, like our game, it can also be fun and a real way of getting to know people. Last week, we looked at the different strengths we had and how we can use them when we spend time with one another. This week, we're going to talk about what it's like to be involved in different communities and how we can practise community.

Option 2 — Family Pictures:

1. Have students draw pictures of their families and write all the ways they are different than their siblings and parents. Be sensitive to the various types of families.
2. You can also bring in some pictures of your own family (extended included) and have them spot differences in the people. They may find older pictures of you funny — play up the humour!
3. Perhaps have a funny family story prepared so that you can highlight the differences in your family.
4. As a group, talk about your families and their various differences.

Prompt: So, in our families, community can be funny, maybe awkward at times. But, like our game, it can also be fun and a real way of getting to know people. Last week, we looked at different strengths we had and how we can use them when we spend time with one another. This week, we're going to talk about what it's like to be involved in different communities and how we can practise community.

Identifying Our Communities:

1. Hand out Appendix D to each student.
2. Have students list all the different communities they are in. You can help them out with some hints (e.g., school, Spanish club, Air Cadets).

These communities may be regular things happening in their lives, but this activity will help them to shift their perspective on what community can be: all the places in our lives we find people and have the potential to make friends and develop relationships.

Prompt: Turn to the person next to you and compare the different types of communities you are each in.

Give the students a moment to chat.

Ask: Do we always find ourselves around like-minded people in these different communities? Do they come from the same places as us? Same family structures?

Suggested answer: Often people from different communities are not similar.

Community as God Sees It:

Prompt: In Christian community, God invites *everyone* into his kingdom. If we are to practise community in the way God sees it, we are also invited to embrace *all* people — even with our differences. Often, it is our differences that give us strength as a unified whole, although sometimes it can feel awkward and hard at the beginning. God promises that it gets better. Let's read some scripture that explains this.

Scripture Reading:

1. Divide students into 3 groups.
2. Have each group look up the verses and answer the questions for their group found in Appendix E (Group 1: Acts 2:42–47; Group 2: Colossians 3:12–16; Group 3: 2 Corinthians 5:14–16).
3. Decide how much time to give them depending on how much time you have left.
4. Have a group member read the scripture aloud to the whole group and the others share their answers [teaching tip 6].

5. Let students know that they will share their answers with the whole group after their small group discussion.

Consolidate/Debrief

Prompt: We have seen what God desires for community here on earth.

Ask: Let's go back to the groups we were just in and answer these questions:

1. What are some ways that you think you can invite people into your own communities?
2. What motivates us to even consider inviting others in?

Have students think and ask 1 person from each group to report their answers after about 5 minutes.

Leader's note: If students are stuck, have them refer to the community lists they created at the beginning of the lesson. How can they invite others in at school? How can they approach "misfits" or people that don't feel like they belong? You can check in on each group as they brainstorm and help them [teaching tip 11].

Prompt: There are all kinds of ways we can invite people into our communities and share time and space with them. We will talk more about that next week. In the meantime, before we leave today, let's take a look at this list of "one-anothers" (Appendix F). Each of these are different suggestions for how to practise being good to one another in community.

1. Read aloud the list of "one-anothers" and then place a copy or 2 on the tables for reference.
2. Invite students to come and take a rock or 2 and decide which action on the list they think they could practise this week.
3. Have them write the phrase on their rocks (or papers).
4. Encourage students to keep this somewhere they will see it regularly this week. They can even take a photo of this rock and use it as their phone "wallpaper" for the week so that they see it daily.
5. Pray to close.

Appendix D

List all the communities you are a part of (e.g., church, school, etc.):

List all the communities you are a part of (e.g., church, school, etc.):

Appendix E

Group 1: Acts 2:42–47

1. What brought this specific community together?
2. Why do you think their group grew so quickly?

Group 2: Colossians 3:12–16

1. What is this scripture asking of us?
2. What particular instructions do you feel are hard or challenging?
3. What might take some practise?

Group 3: 2 Corinthians 5:14–16

1. What do we need to be full of in order to fully love others?
2. Is it easy to see and love people in the way that God sees and loves each of us?
3. Do you think it takes practise to love one another and invite people into our communities?

Appendix F: “One-Anothers” to Practise

- Love one another
- Encourage one another
- Bear one another’s burdens
- Care for one another
- Accept one another
- Be kind to one another
- Live in harmony with one another
- Forgive one another
- Be hospitable to one another
- Honour one another
- Belong to one another
- Be devoted to one another
- Teach one another
- Agree with one another
- Look out for one another
- Worship with one another
- Lay down your lives for one another
- Do not provoke one another
- Do not grumble against one another
- Do not envy one another

Sample rocks:



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Module 2: You're Invited!

Lesson 4: Invitation to Practise Hospitality

Spiritual Aims

Students will hopefully:

- show hospitality as an intrinsic practice of authentic community
- show outsiders that they are welcome (as a result of knowing that God welcomes everyone)
- develop deeper friendships with people in their group
- internalize that what God values is important and can be shown in the way they host and welcome one another

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- list ways they might practise hospitality in their own contexts
- work towards planning an event (e.g., a party or a meal) for their friends, their church or their community
- learn how to invite people into something they are learning about (i.e., community, hospitality, being together, etc.)

Materials Needed

- 1 party invitation per student (you can make them or buy them from a dollar store)
- Party room supplies (e.g., streamers, balloons, candles, pillows, lights, music, etc.)
- Party food and drinks (e.g., hot chocolate, pop, etc.) [teaching tip 5]
- Recording paper and pen
- 1 copy of Appendix H (refer to instructions)
- Optional: Skittles [teaching tip 5]
- 4 to 6 Bibles [teaching tip 7]
- 1 copy of Appendix I per student
- 1 pen per student
- 1 Post-it Note per student
- 1 sheet of paper per student
- Timer (e.g., phone, watch, alarm clock)
- 1 card per student from Appendix G

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Leader's note: The prep time for this lesson is longer than usual, as this lesson culminates in an event that includes a party! It may be a good idea to have extra help (volunteer leaders or a small team) to help with the set-up. It may take 1 to 1.5 hours to prepare, so leave enough time to make it great!

- Choose a space to have a party or special event during your group time. It might be your youth room, the library, the foyer — anywhere you can transform the space and have enough room for all the youth.
- Transform your chosen space, using the party room supplies suggested in the Materials Needed list. Make it comfortable, hospitable and exciting. Consider dimming the lights, stringing up Christmas or white lights around the space, using streamers, playing music, and having bowls of candy or snacks around the space.
- Hand-write an invitation for each student with his or her own name on it. Include details such as the party location, the time and the date. (You can prepare all the invitations and then just write names on the envelopes as students arrive.)
- Mount your preferred recording paper somewhere or place it on the floor in the centre of the space.

Optional: If there are any intergenerational groups in your church that you think might like to host a great party for your youth group, perhaps invite them to do the planning and hosting, and then integrate them into the lesson. This would allow students to mix with people who are not their age and would enable ideas and brainstorming to happen for the entire church body as you consider the community around you.

Minds On

You are hosting a surprise party! This is a very practical way to show students what it is like to host an event and gather as a community.

As students arrive, have a greeter at the door. Have them get the name of each student who attends and write the names on a list. Have this greeter send students to a “game station” or “holding area” until everyone has arrived.

Choose a game to play with those who have arrived. While students play the game, write each student’s name on a personal invitation/envelope. Once the game is done, have another leader hand out an invitation to each student. Either have them locate the party themselves, or explain to them where it’s happening.

Once in the “party room” have more leaders there to welcome the students. Hand them a nice beverage and invite them to make themselves comfortable. Engage them in conversation. Chill out for a while and just enjoy being together. You may want to have a list of “go-to” questions if you are stuck for conversation. Or, play the Skittle Game (see Appendix H for instructions). Once all students have arrived, transition into a more formal discussion.

Leader’s note: The idea is for the space to be comfortable and welcoming. Consider having pillows they can sit on to be on the floor, and attempt to make the setting a little more informal and intimate as you lead the discussion. If you want to make finding the party room more of a quest, provide maps with their invitations and have them collect things along the way that will be used to make the party even more exciting (e.g., glow sticks, stickers, pop cans, little treats, etc.).

Prompt: I’m so glad that you can all be here today! And I’m really glad we can celebrate together as a youth group community.

Ask: Think for a minute about the best party you've attended and why it was so great. Think of parties where you actually spent quality time with people — without the need for alcohol, smoking, physical intimacy, etc. What was it about the people, the conversations, the reason for celebrating and the atmosphere that made it an awesome time?

Give students time to think. Then have them list their ideas (e.g., the food, the event, the friends present, etc.) and write them on your recording paper — or invite a student to record the answers. You will refer to this list later.

Action

Prompt: It's pretty great to attend a party — and even better when you are personally invited! And the best is when you have a great time and feel comfortable and at ease while being hosted. In community, it is important to practise hospitality. It is a crucial part in building authentic community. Hosting people provides us a place to get to know one another better and become more open with one another. A definition of hospitality is "to show friendship to a visitor". Today we are going to see an example of how Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven — his home — in relation to hospitality.

Scripture Reading:

1. Split the group in half and make a separate circle with each of the groups. (Split them by numbering or just down the centre of the room.)
2. Hand out 2 to 3 Bibles per group
3. Group 1 will look up Matthew 22: 2–10. Group 2 will look up Luke 14:15–23
4. Have 2 or 3 students take turns reading the scriptures for their groups.
5. Allow about 5 minutes for each group to read the stories.

Prompt: Both scriptures talk about a wedding or a banquet. It's the same story told a little differently. People get invited to the party, but they don't go. They are too busy and want to do other things. So the host says, go out and invite *anyone* off the street. Everyone is welcome — the good and the bad.

Group Discussion:

1. Switch half of the people in each group by dividing the 2 circles in half.
2. The new groups will discuss the questions from Appendix I, writing their answers on the question paper.
3. Allow about 10 minutes for students to talk through the questions.
4. If there is time, ask them what the bonus verse means when you have gathered back as a group.

Prompt: There aren't pre-requisites for attending God's party — God wants everyone there. We need to learn how to enable people to belong in order for them to know God. Feeling like you belong is the first step in practising hospitality. Let's consider how we can practise our own forms of hospitality and inviting people to belong in all of our communities: school, home, church, clubs, etc.

Post-it Note Brainstorming:

1. Encourage students to think of 1 way they might like to show hospitality or help someone feel like he or she belongs.

2. Hand a Post-it Note to each student. Have them write their ideas on their notes and add them to the recording paper from the Minds On activity.

Consolidate/Debrief

Ask: Now that we have identified all the things we love about good parties or events and have brainstormed ways we can help people to belong, what might we do as a group to practise these things?

Prayer:

1. Hand out a piece of paper and pen to each student.
2. Explain that the group is going to pray and ask God how he can use your group to engage more “outsiders” in your community.
3. Instead of praying aloud, have students write their prayers — asking God how he can use the group and offering ideas to him. Suggest examples, such as hosting your own party and inviting friends, or hanging out with the older people in your church and cooking a meal for them. Simply saying, “Hey God, what do you think?” is a good place to start!
4. Set the timer for 5 minutes and collect their prayer papers when the time is up.
5. Follow-up on these ideas at a later point when you have time to work on a group event.

Leader’s note: The goal of this prayer time is to encourage your students to host an event of their own — maybe a kick-off party to celebrate an upcoming holiday, where they invite “outsiders” from their schools. Or maybe your group could host an evening of fun for your church congregation or for the younger kids. Perhaps you will revamp your youth room space to make it more hospitable and inviting. Work with your students to get their thoughts and move towards an *action* that will enable the process of invitation and practicing hospitality.

Because you have tangibly showed your students hospitality this evening, end with a way to encourage each of them. Before you wrap up, say something that you love about each of them. Make it personal. Thank them for being there this evening and invite them to come again. As cheesy as it sounds, it affirms their being in your community and says that you want them back!

Leader’s note: If you have lots of students, consider dividing into groups and have 1 leader per group. Allow that leader to encourage each member in their group and then come back as a large group to go home.

Just like at a party, have a “good-bye favour” (Appendix G). Read the scripture and explain that each us is invited into this practice of community and hospitality daily. Hand a card to each student. Pray to close.

Appendix G

<p>“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Romans 12:12–13 (NIV)</p>	<p>“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Romans 12:12–13 (NIV)</p>	<p>“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Romans 12:12–13 (NIV)</p>
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Appendix H: Skittles Game

Prepare a specific conversation-starter question for each colour of Skittle in the bag. Put the questions in the middle of the space. Have each student take 3 to 5 Skittles. Have them take turns answering the questions that correspond to the colours of Skittles they have in their hands. Once answered, they can eat their Skittles.

