



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

## The Big Questions / Week 3

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### SERIES BOTTOM LINE

Our biggest questions deserve better answers.

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students see that they belong here and to work toward making their small group a place where everyone feels like they belong.

### WEEK 3 BOTTOM LINE

**You belong here.**

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### SCRIPTURE

- *Acts 16:13-15 NLT*
  - *Acts 16:40 NIV*
  - *Galatians 3:26-28 NIV*
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### TEACHING SLIDES

All Scripture, bottom lines, and teaching points that are bolded in this script are also provided as slides in your weekly "Teaching" folder.

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### OPTIONAL VIDEOS

\*OPTIONAL MEDIA for this week available for purchase through the XP3 HS Media Package:

- The Big Questions Countdown (10 minutes)
  - The Big Questions Teaching Video – week 3
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# TEACHING OUTLINE

## INTRODUCTION

- *Note: Tell a personal story about a time when you didn't feel like you fit. End by asking this question: Where do I fit?*

## TENSION

- I bet all of us have had some sort of an experience when we wondered where we'd fit in.
- Asking "Where do I fit in?" is one of life's biggest questions. It's a question that will continue to come up, no matter what stage of life you're in.
- Belonging means you are safe to be yourself. Not the "you" that people expect you to be, but the "you" you actually are.
- And because belonging can look like so many things, where we feel like we belong changes all the time.
- Every day, situations happen that change our sense of belonging. And that can be exhausting. We feel like we're constantly having to work to fit in where we want to fit.

## TRUTH

- If we're talking about superheroes of the Christian faith, Paul would definitely be on the list. Paul traveled all around the known world to share the Good News.
- But there was a problem. All of the original followers of Jesus were Jewish. They grew up going to the Temple and hearing how God promised that at some point He would send a Messiah, or Savior.
- Then Jesus showed up, and the Jewish people realized He was the Messiah they had been waiting for all these years!
- When the disciples started leaving Jerusalem to tell people the message of Jesus—the promised Messiah—they ran into a group of people called Gentiles. Now, "Gentiles" simply means: not Jewish.
- There were some leaders of the Church who thought these Gentiles couldn't just *decide* to follow Jesus; they had to be Jewish FIRST in order to belong.
- So, Paul travels to Philippi, and on the Sabbath, the Jewish holy day, he and his traveling companions go a bit outside the city where they meet a woman named Lydia.
  - *On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. "If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my home." And she urged us until we agreed (Acts 16:13-15 NLT).*
- Remember, Lydia is a Gentile, and on top of that, she is a woman. Two strikes against her in that time. Lydia's also a boss—literally, she runs a business—and she's not afraid of asking big questions.
- But here she is, listening to him talk about this man named Jesus, and it's affecting her. She wants to belong.
- Lydia had accepted Paul's invitation to follow Jesus, but she knew it was possible there would be more required of her to truly belong.
- So, what does Paul do? Well, Luke doesn't tell us immediately. He makes us wait and talks about a time when Paul and Silas ended up in prison, got in a crazy situation, saved a guy's life, and then got out of prison.
  - *After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left (Acts 16:40 NIV).*
- You see, for Paul and Silas, this was a big moment. Lydia, a non-Jew, and her friends were no longer outsiders. They were like *brothers and sisters*.

- And in case we think this was just Paul being nice this one time, following the book of Acts, we find a letter he wrote to a church in Galatia. In it, Paul is writing to tell the people exactly what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and he writes this:
  - *So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28 NIV).*
- All of those categories that make you feel like you don't fit are done. With God's people, you fit. That was Paul's message. And that is the message of the Church.
- You belong here.

#### APPLICATION

- So I want you to ask yourself a few questions:
  - How have I believed that I don't belong with God's people?
  - How have I acted as if others don't belong?
  - Have I believed that I don't belong with God?

#### LANDING

- What if YOUR small group, or our whole youth group, acted as if this idea was true? What if our church became known as a place to belong?
- What if you lived with confidence, knowing that you belong here—with God and with God's people?



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# TEACHING SCRIPT

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## The Big Questions / Week 3

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PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

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### BOTTOM LINE

**You belong here.**

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### INTRODUCTION

2 MINUTES

#### TELL A PERSONAL STORY

*\*\* (Communicator note: tell your own story of a time when you didn't feel like you fit. Make it less than 200 words and less than 1 minute 30 seconds long in delivery. End by asking this question: Where do I fit?)*

Going into middle school, my family moved, and we attended a new church. The church we came from was really small, and the youth group was non-existent. Part of my parent's decision to change churches was to find a place with a youth ministry where I could get involved. Since I was the least athletically inclined of their kids, my parents figured that if sports weren't going to offer me a place to fit in, then maybe church would.

The first Sunday we went, I felt totally misplaced. I knew no one, and everyone else seemed to know each other. No one else looked as awkward as I did. They had people to talk to. They knew the songs. They understood the inside joke that the youth pastor told. And they knew where to go when it was time for small groups. I felt like a tourist in a foreign country. Out of place. Out of sorts. Out of my comfort zone. Can you relate? The whole time, this question kept going through my mind:

#### **Do I fit here?**

I felt like everyone else fit in, but I didn't. Have you ever felt that way?

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### TENSION

3 MINUTES

I bet all of us have had some sort of an experience where we wondered where we'd fit in. Even if everything looked fine on the outside, there may have been that feeling on the inside that we didn't quite belong where we were. Maybe you can relate.

- Going to a new school or church
- Joining a new team
- Liking a show no one else is into
- Being totally uninterested in that one app everyone can't stop talking about
- Being with your friends, but feeling like an outsider
- Being with your own family (Even though they're the people who should know you best, you may have times when you feel like an outsider with them.)

Why do we feel hurt when moments like this happen? **Because the desire to belong somewhere is hardwired into us.** We can't help it! We are designed to find our place with people who feel like our people.

**Asking "Where do I fit in?" is one of life's biggest questions.** It's a question that will continue to come up, no matter what stage of life you're in. But what exactly does that mean? How do you know when you've found a place where you fit in? And what does that look like?

**Belonging means you are safe to be yourself.** Not the "you" that people expect you to be, but the "you" you actually are. The one who likes green jolly ranchers and Arby's roast beef sandwiches and that trend or artist that is not cool anymore, but you don't care. In other words:

- We belong when we find a place where every part of us is welcome, and nothing has to be hidden.
- We belong when we're with people who share our interests, and when we're with people who don't share our interests, but we respect each other and our differences.
- We belong where we feel needed. If there's something that only we can do that makes us stand out and be useful to the group in a way that only we can, we fit.

And because belonging looks like all of these things, where we feel like we belong changes all the time.

- One fight with a friend, and you wonder if you fit in with that friend anymore.
- One missed goal on the soccer field makes you wonder if the team still likes you.
- One bad grade on a test, and you wonder if the teacher has lost respect for you.
- One breakup, and you wonder if your ex's friends are still your friends.

Every day, situations happen that change our sense of belonging. And that can be exhausting. **We feel like we're constantly having to work to fit in where we want to fit.** And sometimes, if we get really honest, we wonder, "Does the REAL me fit here? Or do I only fit here because of what people think I am? Does the REAL me belong anywhere?"

The good news is that what we're going to talk about today has the potential to help all of us answer this question!

## TRUTH

8 MINUTES

We are going to look at a passage of Scripture today found in the book of Acts, which is all about the early Church and what happened when the disciples took the message of Jesus dying and coming back to life to the world around them. It's basically telling the origin story of the Church. And in a lot of ways, the decisions the disciples and new followers of Jesus made in these early years determined what the Church would ultimately become.

Like any new group getting started, they had to figure out just who was going to fit or belong in this group. But there was a challenge for these early Jesus followers—and stay with me because this needs some explaining.

All of the original followers of Jesus were Jewish. That means they grew up going to the Temple and hearing stories about people from long ago who had confidence that God would one day send a Messiah, or Savior. And then Jesus showed up, and some Jewish people realized He was the Messiah they had been waiting for all these years! But when the disciples started leaving Jerusalem to tell people the message of Jesus—that He was the promised Messiah—they ran into a group of people called Gentiles. “Gentiles” simply means: not Jewish. These “not-Jewish people” didn’t necessarily believe in this idea of one God. They didn’t go to the Temple. They weren’t included in the people of Israel who God had promised to send a Messiah to. And so that raised some questions. There were some leaders of the Church who thought these Gentiles couldn’t just *decide* to follow Jesus. Some leaders expected followers of Jesus to be Jewish FIRST. That may sound strange to us now, but up until that point, all followers of Jesus were Jewish. To make it even more complicated, there were a lot of things about the Jewish faith that weren’t just religious ideas—they were cultural and ethnic ideas, too. Being Jewish wasn’t just about how you believed or where you went to church on the weekend. It was about how you grew up, what you ate, what you wore, who you hung out with, and where you lived. Being Jewish was a WHOLE thing. And so, in a lot of ways, to the early Jesus followers, it seemed crazy to imagine Gentiles just all of a sudden *deciding* to follow—to fit into—this new faith.

One of the first champions of the Christian faith was Paul, who originally was basically a Jewish superhero. He totally belonged among Jews. Then Jesus turned his life upside down—including where Paul fit in. Jesus told him that he now belonged not only to the Jewish family but to the Christian family. Everything changed for Paul when he started following Jesus. He wanted everyone to know about what Jesus had done for him.

But it wasn’t without its challenges.

Paul traveled all around the known world to share the story of Jesus, and on his way to Philippi, he was about to have his world rocked again. Paul and his traveling companions were traveling on the Sabbath, which is the Jewish holy day. They go a bit outside the city where they meet a woman named Lydia. Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, tells the story this way:

*On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed (Acts 16:13-15 NLT).*

Now, this may not seem like much of a story, but remember Lydia is a Gentile, and on top of that, she is a woman. Two strikes against her. As a woman in that time and culture, she didn’t have a lot of power or influence or credibility. But Lydia’s also a boss—literally, she runs a business—and she’s not afraid of asking big questions. So here she is, listening to the words of Paul, as he talks about this man named Jesus, and it’s affecting her. She wants to be part of this movement. She wants to belong. She wants to be in. But she knows there are more than a few reasons why she might be kept out, and even if she’s good with God, she may not be good with God’s people. So, she invites Paul to stay at her house, but she leads by saying this:

*If you agree that I am true believer in the Lord . . .*

*In other words, Do I really belong? I am a Gentile, I am a woman, I have every reason to believe you think I don’t fit here. But I also have faith. Is that enough? Can I fit in, can I belong with God’s people, with only that qualification?*

Lydia had accepted Paul’s invitation to follow Jesus, but she knew it was possible there would be more required of her to truly belong. *Sure, you can say I am true believer, but do you believe it enough to come to my house? To be seen with me?*

It was a good question. Because culturally, ethnically, religiously, there would have been a lot of

reasons for Lydia not to belong. In that time period, going to someone's house wasn't just a casual thing. It was a way of showing you were 100% cool with that person. And it wouldn't have been unusual or strange for Paul to say, "Well, on second thought, you may not be *totally* in."

So what does Paul do? Well, Luke doesn't tell us immediately. He makes us wait and talks about a time when Paul and Silas ended up in prison, got in a crazy situation, saved a guy's life, and then got out of prison. It's quite a story. You should read it. But here's what happens next with Lydia's story.

*After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left (Acts 16:40 NIV).*

You see, for Paul and Silas, this was a big moment. Lydia, a non-Jew, and her friends were no longer outsiders. They weren't just invited to watch the Jesus movement. They were like *brothers and sisters*. These were the friends Paul and Silas went to after they had been THROUGH it and needed a safe place. These were ride-or-dies or like family (in the best way possible). In fact, it sounds like while Paul and Silas were off in prison, Lydia was starting a house church that was already taking off in Philippi.

Paul doesn't say *why* he makes the decision he does. But it's obvious this was a chance for Paul—and the Holy Spirit—to make a point. And the question was, what kind of point would he make? And remember, there is more on the line here than just this one meeting. This was setting the standard for this new faith. It wasn't just about Lydia. It was about all the people just like Lydia and whether they would be able to belong, too. Women. Non-Jews. Rich people. Poor people. People who get everything right—and everyone else. Just how big could this belonging thing get?

So what would Paul do? He goes to Lydia's house. And in case we think this was just Paul being nice this one time, following the book of Acts, we find a letter he wrote to a church in Galatia—another mostly Gentile city. In it, Paul is writing to tell the people exactly what it means to be a follower of Jesus, and he writes this:

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28 NIV).*

Over and over is that phrase, "there is neither." In other words, those categories that kept you separate, that allowed some of you to think of yourselves as better than others, that made some people feel in and other people feel out, those are done. Those categories that made some people belong and others feel excluded, that made some people feel like they fit, and others like they were misfits . . . all of those categories are done. With God's people, you fit. That was Paul's message. And that is the message of the Church:

**You belong here.**

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## APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

So, there are a few questions that I want you to ask yourself as we wrap up our time together about whether or not you—and others—feel like you belong here:

**How have I believed that I don't belong with God's people?** If you've ever felt that way, I want you to know that you're invited to be in real community with God's people. This is the place—and these are the people—where you most belong. And like Lydia, she had reasons to believe she couldn't belong. She didn't have power or influence or credibility, but Paul still offered an invitation. And that invitation can be a game-changer for you.

**How have I acted as if others don't belong?** Paul's conviction to welcome outsiders into the Church is an example for us, too. When it comes to the way I see and treat others, am I making sure they feel like they fit and belong? Do I include the guy in class that doesn't have many friends? Do I invite the girl to sit with me at lunch when she is sitting alone? Who do I leave out or pull into the group chat? When people interact with me, do they feel seen?

**Have I believed that I don't belong with God?** A lot of us have heard some wrong ideas about what God is like. We may even think that God wants nothing to do with us or is just tolerating us. We may believe that we couldn't possibly fit with God or belong with Him because of what we have or haven't done. And so, we live with this sense of shame, feeling isolated from God because of what we think He thinks about us. If that's you, you need to know that you belong with God just as you are. You fit with God. And that's great news for you, but it's also great news for everyone. **We believe that God wants all of us to belong, every person.** And part of discovering that YOU belong with God and God's people is discovering that everyone else does, too.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

That's one of the reasons why we care so much about small groups here. Because we want to invest time and energy into creating spaces where people feel like they belong. The group of people you're with every week—and the leader you have—all exist because we represent God's people. We are the church, and we want everyone who shows up here to know that they belong right where they are.

What if YOUR small group, or our whole youth group, acted as if this idea was true? What if our church became known as a place to belong? How might the church look different as well as the community around us? What if you lived with confidence, knowing that **you belong here—with God and with God's people.** Imagine what it might look like if you intentionally worked to make this a place where others can belong as well.



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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