

WEEK 1 LESSON GUIDE

What If...

BIG IDEA

What if God wants you to meet someone's needs?

BIBLE

Acts 9:36–43; Isaiah 58:6–8;
Proverbs 22:9

ABOUT THIS WEEK

When artists paint, they're intentional about the colors they use because each one serves a purpose. This week, we'll hear Tabitha's story as we explore how we can serve our communities and let them serve us in return. We can follow her model and make a difference in the people around us because **what if God wants you to meet someone's needs?**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Paper Plate Pictionary

- Welcome to the first week of our new series, *What If ...!* Who doesn't love a "what if" question? What if McDonald's runs out of ketchup? What if I lose my retainer in the trash can again? What if my sister tells my parents what happened to the lamp in the living room? Raise your hand if you've ever thought of or asked a silly or serious "what if" question yourself. I'm glad to see I'm not alone! Now, let's kick things off with a game that will leave us all with more questions.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this game, you'll need some paper plates, a hole punch, string, and something to draw with, like crayons, colored pencils, paint, and brushes. To play, divide the room into two teams and choose two volunteers to compete against each other. Give both volunteers one word. After strapping their paper plate to the top of their head, players attempt to draw their words without looking, periodically showing the audience their picture for them to guess—the first team to correctly guess wins.
- When you hear "Pictionary," that's probably not what you had in mind! You needed so much creativity and flexibility to get close to what you needed to draw! It's wild how a little tweak to what we're doing can make things so much more complicated! I know that when things are difficult, I can use all the help I can get.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - What's the kindest thing someone has ever done to help you?
 - ☆ What's easier for you: to ask for help or to give help? Why do you think that is?
 - Do you know of any people for whom helping comes naturally? Why do you think it is easy for them?

STORY | Talk About A Time Someone Met Your Needs

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a short story about a time someone helped you. Maybe they offered you a ride while

your car was in the shop or cooked you a meal while recovering from an illness or injury. To add a thematic element, find a coloring page, turn yourself into a [coloring page](#), tape it to the wall, and incorporate talking about when they met your needs and added color life to your story. Share about what they did, which needs they met, and how it made you feel. Every time they do something, color in the picture to show how they help add color to your life.

- Every day presents us with opportunities to help people. Helping others can better their lives, uplift them, alleviate their burdens, and even help us feel full of joy and purpose. Moving from seeing a need in someone's life to taking action is important, but it is also one of the most difficult. What would it look like for you to take the next step to actually help someone?

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

SCRIPTURE | Acts 9:36–43

- The Bible shows remarkable examples of people who took time to care for others. One of those people is named Tabitha. Her story is found in Acts 9.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Acts 9:36–43.
- Tabitha is awesome! She's described as always doing good and helping people who are experiencing poverty. At this time, there was a struggle with what it looked like to follow Jesus and who was allowed to be part of the community worshiping Jesus. But Tabitha didn't let those labels stop her from caring for people. She just wanted to use her gifts to help others and tell them about Jesus.
- So that's what she did. She served and cared for people. She was such a beloved community member the people were devastated when she died. When Peter shows up, this group of widows she had been caring for shows him all of the incredible clothes and robes Tabitha made for them.
- She added goodness, joy, and hope to the lives of those around her, covering them with her care and kindness.
- As Tabitha looked around the world, she could recognize the world wasn't as it should be. She saw so many people with needs and decided to do something about it. People knew who she was because she cared for this group of widows—often among the community's most vulnerable.
- She used her skills and talents to make clothes and robes for the widows, but it wasn't just about what she could do for them. Her care made them feel differently, too. Tabitha created a space for people to feel loved, secure, and cared for.
- When we think about helping people, we often go straight to needs like food, water, and shelter. Those are essential needs, but we can't overlook how we can love people through connection, a kind word, or simply acknowledging their existence. Tabitha did all of those things and, by doing so, showed a way toward justice in the world.

VIDEO | "Justice" From The Bible Project

- Tabitha was living in a way God had always hoped we would. God's people were intended to help create justice in the world. This was made clear in the life of Jesus. Humanity was always meant to partner with God to see the wrongs in the world and make them right.
- The term "justice" is frequently used, but its meaning can vary. For Tabitha and God's followers, justice has specific significance. While today's understanding of justice varies, the Bible clearly defines and shows us what it means to live justly.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play [this video on "Justice"](#) (0:03–5:49) from The Bible Project as a teaching tool. We always suggest viewing the clip beforehand to make sure you think it's a video that will be a good fit for your context. For more information on legally using copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)

- As you can see, justice is an ancient biblical idea. The Early Church continued something the people of God were always supposed to be about.

SCRIPTURE | Isaiah 58:6–8

- Here's a passage from about 700 years before Tabitha was caring for the people around her, and it has some specific ways God hoped people would care for each other.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Isaiah 58:6–8.
- A lot is happening here, so let's break it down. Before these verses, we see God addressing people who have tried to follow through with religious practices, such as fasting, except they are missing the mark. God is not interested in them merely checking off "fasted" from a religious to-do list. God is far more interested in how God's people treat each other. So, God reminds the people of the complete picture of what they were invited into.
- When we say "Yes" to following God, we're invited to become people who bring justice into the world with God's help. We can focus on helping to care for the basic needs of others while showing them the way toward the freedom found in Jesus.
- In Isaiah 58, God shows us practical ways to make a real difference—like sharing food, giving clothes, and helping those facing tough situations. It could mean helping out at a food drive, donating clothes to a shelter, or volunteering with after-school programs to work with kids who need support. The Bible reminds us that with God's help, we can step up and bring positive change and justice to the world around us.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.
 - If someone described you like Tabitha as "always doing good and helping the poor," what kind of thing would you be involved in?
 - ★ What sticks out to you about Isaiah 58? What do you think about what Isaiah says God wants us to be concerned about? Are these things you care about?
 - How do these two passages challenge your understanding of God?

IMAGE | A Sunday Afternoon On The Island of La Grande Jatte—Georges Seurat

- Everyone wants to be a part of making things right for people. This vision of justice God gives to us is inspiring. Of course, we want people to be fed, sheltered, loved, and protected. Of course, we want to see people be free from their burdens. But ... how do we do it? There is an art technique that can help us visualize what it looks like to care for others.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, show a picture like [A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte — Georges Seurat](#). For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)
 - This painting is *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* by artist Georges Seurat. It uses a painting technique called pointillism, where an artist uses tiny dots of color to create a painting. If you look closely, it almost feels like a static Instagram filter was placed on top of this image, but that's just the Pointillism technique at work.
 - If you zoom in close to this photo, you see a series of little dots all doing their own thing. It might not even look like a painting but a random assortment of colors and paint. You only get the full effect of pointillism when you zoom out and see the whole thing working together.
- That's sort of what it can look like for us to bring justice and God's love into the world. Like Tabitha, it starts as an individual thing. She used what she was already good at to bless and love her community. One woman

did one thing to show love to one group of people. Tabitha was adding her dot of color to God's world.

- If we all took her approach and zoomed out, we'd see all these little individual people working towards creating the beauty in the world God dreamed of. Each dot of color would be part of a larger work of justice that God is creating. That's the great thing about pointillism—and about the life God has set up for us—every little detail matters. All of it works together to make a huge difference in us, the people we care for, and our communities.
- When Tabitha looked at the world, she saw a new way to do things. She connected her gifts with God's vision for the world and took action to show care for a group of people that mattered to her. She saw a need and took steps to help meet them.
- You don't need the most money, the best resources, or a five-point plan to start helping people. God is giving you the chance to start taking care of people today—right now—and working towards bringing justice and beauty into the world. God is inviting you to add a dot of color to the world. The story of Tabitha and Isaiah begs a simple question: **what if God wants you to meet someone's needs?**

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

RESPONSE | Making Things Right

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this response, you'll need either a whiteboard and dry-erase markers or a large sheet of paper and markers. Before your program, set them up so you can write down your group's ideas. Ask teenagers about the needs they see and ways they can help meet those needs. As they come up with ideas, write down their responses and help create tangible ways to follow through this week.
- God has already equipped you to start caring for people's needs. You are in a unique position with specific gifts and perspectives to start making a difference by bringing God's justice to the world. Here are a few things that can help you think about the question: **what if God wants you to meet someone's needs?**
 - **GOD INSPIRES YOU TO BECOME BETTER.** There are parts of your life God has already transformed. No matter how long you've been following Jesus, you're in the process of being made better every single day. As you are being changed, God adds color to your world and wants you to share that experience with others. So, what parts of your story could you use to help care for others? Think about how you can connect with people who may have similar experiences and look to take care of their needs.
 - **YOU CAN MAKE THINGS BETTER.** You're already a part of a group of friends and a community of people who need someone to care for their needs. You can care for those people and help them in their areas of need. What spaces can you make better by just being there? That's what Tabitha did. She connected her presence to her gifts and worked to make the space she was already in even better for people. Just like Tabitha used her gifts to help those in need, you can use yours to meet the needs of those around you.
- Let's start thinking about tangible ways to make things right and call out the beauty in our communities. When we look to take care of other people's needs and trust God to lead us in the right direction, we help bring beauty and new life into the world.
- So remember, God makes you better, and you can improve things. You can show care to others. You just have to respond to a question and let God lead you toward bringing justice to your community. **What if God wants you to meet someone's needs?**

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.

- ✧ Have you ever seen one small caring action snowball into bigger ones? What happened? What would it look like for you to replicate those actions?
- ✧ What is something that holds you back from meeting people's needs? What would it look like to overcome that this week?

REFLECTION | Make Your Mark

- This week, we are starting an art project and will add to it as a community every week. Each of you contributes your unique skills and perspective to this world. We're going to spend a few minutes painting this canvas, and we're going to add a new layer to it each week of this series. Paint however you feel led to paint... in big strokes, small strokes, one color, lots of colors. Use this time to express how God is speaking to you.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this Response, you need a large canvas or thick cardboard, a paint tarp, paints, cups to hold paint, glue and paintbrushes, a few tables, and some small sheets of paper. Before your program, set up an area where teenagers will start a progressive art mural to use different art mediums to create a community art piece. If you use the room design suggested in the environment guide, this station is built into that backdrop. In addition to the big station where teenagers can add directly to the mural, there are a few small stations where students can paint independently. Have them attach it to the larger image at the end of the reflection time. If it helps your teenagers have a prompt about what to paint, have them create an art piece about what it looks like to meet people's needs. If they need more direction, encourage the group to add a few dots and use a Sharpie to write how they will meet someone's needs on the mural.*
- You can utilize how God intentionally made you to bring justice and make a difference. You have made a unique contribution to this work of art, just like you have made a contribution to helping bring God's love to set things right in the lives of the people around you.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups.*
 - **Read Proverbs 22:9. Why do you think the writer says that people who meet other needs and not just those who meet their needs are happy? Have you ever experienced that to be true? What is one thing you could do to test if this is true in your life this week?**
 - **Today, what's one step you will take toward meeting people's needs?**

ACTIVITY | The What If ... Project

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you haven't already done so, this would be a great time to invite your group to get involved in "The What if... Project" discipleship activity. There are all sorts of ways to help get teenagers involved that you can read about in the planning documents over in the [Discipleship folder](#).*
- When you see someone this week who needs help, ask a simple question—**What if God wants you to meet someone's needs?**