



Text: Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 NLT [I use *The Message* in addition to the NLT for emphasis in a few areas as well.]

The Goal: To show students that no matter who they are, what they've done, where they've been, they BELONG at church because their identity is found in Jesus!

Introduction

All of us ask questions. Sometimes we ask big, important questions and sometimes we ask crazy, ridiculous questions. Regardless, we all ask them. We ask them out loud in school, at home, and with our friends. Then, there are other questions that we silently wonder about from time to time. They are complex questions that EVERY teenager is asking themselves or will ask themselves in the future.

Has anyone ever asked the question, “*Who am I?*” I know it seems like a weird question, but most of us want to know what it is about us that makes us unique and different from everybody else. Is there anything about you that makes you special? We also want to know if we are accepted by the people around us. We ask questions about the people around us as we try to figure out where we fit in.

We ask questions like, “*Does anyone like me?*” This isn't just a boyfriend/girlfriend type of question. It is a question that helps us determine who we like to be around and who likes to be around us. We all have wanted to know at some point or another if ‘that’ person likes spending time with us or not. We consistently make decisions about who we want to spend our time with and who we want to avoid. Especially as teenagers move into high school, you are clarifying their friend group all the time. We all want to know where we stand and who, if anybody, has our back.

This is when we ask, “*Do I have friends?*” If so, who are they? So many of us love the stability that comes from knowing that we have people around us who care about us and want to see us succeed!

This next question is one of my favorites. There is a stage of a teenager's life where they start asking like, "*Why should I care?*" "Does school really matter?" "Do I need to try?" "Is my faith really that important?" "My friends don't seem to care about this, so why should I?" Has anybody ever found themselves asking these questions before?

As teenagers prepare to graduate from school and move onto their next stage of life they begin to ask, "*How can I make a difference?*" We all want to do something that matters. None of us want to waste our lives doing something that no one cares about, but a lot of times we don't know how to make a difference. We see other people doing incredible things but feel as if we are incapable of living up to that standard. We want to do something important, but we wonder if we have what it takes. As we think about moving on to doing something else after high school this question becomes more and more pressing. *What are we going to do with our lives? Will it matter? Do we have a purpose?* If so, how do we know what it is?

Tension

All of us at have asked these questions at some point in time. Some of us are asking them right now. Some of us will be asking them over the next few years. These questions are normal. Asking these questions doesn't make you weird. It means you are human and that you desire to do something significant. Teenagers aren't the only ones who ask these questions either. Many adults still ask these questions as well!

It's because these questions are questions about our **Identity**. Your identity is the thing that makes you, you. It is all of your friends, decisions, family, experiences, skills, and fears wrapped up into skin and bones. But your identity is also a bit deeper than that as well. It encompasses your heart, and soul, and mind. It includes your thoughts about God, and yourself. It deals with your thoughts, your emotions, and your opinions about others. It is all connected. All these questions about identity help us learn more about ourselves.

If we are honest, these questions about identity can really all be summed up by one question. That's because they all are secretly the same question! The question is, "*Where do I belong?*" Our identity is rooted in the answer to this question. Our answer to this question will reveal a lot about who we believe ourselves to be. It is connected to where we find purpose, and

meaning, and significance. We want to belong. We want to know that we are safe, known, and cared for. Think about all these other questions.

[It would be helpful here to go through the questions from the Introduction again. This will not only refresh their memory but help them to see how many of these questions are very similar to 'Where Do I Belong?'].

In their own way, they all ask the question "*Where do I belong?*" We cannot separate where we belong from our identity.

We choose our friends based on where we think we belong. We go to places we belong and avoid places we feel we don't belong. All of us have been somewhere we felt we did not belong. It's weird. It's awkward. It makes us uncomfortable, and we never want to go back!

Usually, we decide whether or not we belong somewhere by the similarities we have with the other people who are there. We also decide whether we belong somewhere by the way we are treated and by the safety of where we are. We decide whether we belong by the significance and purpose we find wherever we are.

[Take some time here to really craft this section to your particular audience. I believe it is good to discuss several areas students feel that they may not belong. This is where they will begin to feel the weight of the message and the power of the conversation at hand. If this section connects with your audience, they will be focus in to hear the rest.]

Unfortunately, many of us feel like most of the time we don't belong anywhere. We try to fit in, but it is overwhelming to keep up! Some of you tried out for a team (sports, music, arts, etc.) and quickly realized that you did not belong on that team. You were interested in different things and the conversations going on around you made you uncomfortable.

Some of you leave work every day thinking, "Wow! I do not belong here! These people are crazy!" Some of us walk the hallways at school just hoping no one will notice us or call us out because we feel so out of place at our own schools. We feel misunderstood and like we don't belong. Some of us feel like we don't even belong at home. Your family life is in chaos, and you just wish there was a place you could go to be free from the stress and pressure. So many of us are wondering, "Do I belong anywhere?"



Goal of the Small Group Guide: This guide exists to provide the small group leader with talking points and questions to prompt further conversation about the **You Belong Here** message!

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Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

31 If God is for us, who can ever be against us? **32** Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? **33** Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. **34** Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. **35** Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death?

37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. **38** And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. **39** No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Small Group Questions:

- 1) Which of the questions from the beginning of the message have you asked yourself before? What, if any, of the questions are you trying to figure out the answer to now?

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