



WEEK 1

HYBRID TEACHING GUIDE

SQUAD UP

THE BIG IDEA

We can be part of God's family.

THE BIBLE

Ephesians 1:1-23; Galatians 3:26-28

ACTIVITY | Squad War Score Board

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Throughout this series, divide your students into four squads, each represented by different colors (pink, orange, white, and blue). If you have students engaged in consistent small groups, we suggest dividing your squads up in a way that allows small groups to stay together. How you divide your squads is up to you (grade, gender, school, etc.) – the point is simply to divide them into four equal-ish squads that will compete in a series of games throughout the series. To keep track of each team's points, set up four [large glass containers](#) on stage. You'll also need ping pong balls, marbles, or water and food coloring in the colors of each squad. Before Week 1, fill each container about 25% full – one for each squad color. When a team wins a game, fill that team's container a little bit more to show their progress. At the end of the series, the team with the fullest container wins a prize. And be sure to keep the containers safe so no one cheats!*

ACTIVITY | Squad War: Round 1

- We're starting a new series today called Squad Up. To get us started, I thought we could play a quick game with our squads. At the end of this series, the winning squad will win a prize!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Download the images provided in your Week 1 folder. For each round, choose one student from each team to come to the front of the room and stand with their backs to your screen. Put the first image on the screen and ask the crowd to give the contestants hints about what is on the screen, without saying any of the words shown. The first contestant to say the correct answer is the winner. Repeat for as many rounds as you'd like – we've given you 11 images. At the end of the game, the squad with the most correct answers is the winner.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share.
- **Who's your favorite fictional squad and why?**
- **Who are some of the people in your squad, and how did you meet them?**
- **What are some of the times when having a squad you can trust becomes really important?**

QUESTION | Which famous squad is your squad like?

- Circle up with your squad. **Think of some famous groups of friends from TV, movies, or YouTube. Who is your squad like, and why?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give students a few moments to share with their teams. To close, ask everyone to shout out their answers together. Then ask a few students to share and briefly explain their answers.

IMAGE | Your Favorite Fictional Squad

- The Toy Story toys, the Avengers, the kids from *The Goonies*, Scooby and the gang, or the kids from *Stranger Things* – there are so many squads to choose from!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Show a photo of your favorite squad from a movie or TV show and share why you love them.
- When I think of an iconic squad, I think of them! They work together, they have each other's backs, and even though they have their problems, they're (almost) always looking out for each other.

EVERYONE WANTS A SQUAD

- Everyone wants that kind of squad, right? We all want a safe group of people to hang with in class, at lunch, on the weekends, or maybe even for our whole lives.
- Whether your squad is a group of ten or more friends, or your squad is one or two trusted people, that's great! The point is that we all want to belong in a community of safe people.
- It's normal to want that kind of community, but sometimes we feel more pressure than usual to find a place where we feel like we belong, like . . .
 - At the start of a new school year.
 - When life sends big or unexpected changes.
 - When we're the new kid.
 - When we feel alone or misunderstood.
- I can't make sure you always have someone to walk to class with, but I know Someone who is willing to walk with you always and invites you into a community of people where you can truly belong.

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

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- **What are some groups you've been a part of that have felt like family? What made those groups feel like family?**
- ✳ **Talk about a time when you didn't feel like you belonged.**
- ✳ **Do you think our church feels like a family where anyone can belong? Why or why not?**

STORY | Talk about a time when Jesus-followers showed you true community.

- When some people hear the word "church," they might think about a building, a preacher, a certain kind of dress code, or somewhere they're forced to go. **But the Church is meant to be so much more than just a building or an event!** It's meant to be a community where we can belong and grow.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Share a story (or ask a volunteer or student to share a story) about a time when the Church helped you through a difficult time, brought you your closest friends, or met your needs in some way. When you talk about "the Church," be sure to talk about the body of believers, rather than a building, program, or event. Focus on how your relational, emotional, or physical needs were met, but don't forget to share how that community helped you grow closer to God too!*
- This is the kind of community Jesus always intended for us to find in the church, but not every story is like the one I just shared. Sometimes Jesus-followers . . .
 - Aren't great at getting along.
 - Care more about their preferences than other people.
 - Are judgmental.
- When we get it right, being a part of the Church can change peoples' lives, like it changed mine. But when we get it wrong, people can walk away from church (and even their faith) feeling disappointed, hurt, and maybe even more alone than ever.

SCRIPTURE | Ephesians 1:1

- You and I might think it's difficult to be the kind of Church God wants us to be, but imagine how hard it must have been for the very first Jesus-followers!
 - Have you ever thought about the fact that the Church didn't always exist? The Church wasn't established until after Jesus' time on earth.
 - When the Church was getting started, everyone was trying to figure out not only how to follow Jesus, but how to get along with each other as well.
 - The earliest Christians came from many different religious backgrounds, cultures, ethnicities, and social classes — just like today. Learning to get along with such a diverse group of people wasn't exactly easy.
- One of the ways early church leaders helped Jesus-followers understand how to live out their faith

was by writing letters. They'd fill their letters with instructions, challenges, and encouragement, and then send them to believers in other towns, cities, or even whole regions.

- In the Bible, we find several letters written by a follower of Jesus named Paul.
- When Paul was a young man, he hated Jesus and those who followed Him. Paul fought against the spread of Christianity by imprisoning and killing Jesus-followers.
- *But then . . .* Paul met Jesus and everything changed. He took all the energy he'd put into fighting the spread of Christianity and became one of its greatest evangelists instead.
- One of the letters Paul wrote was to Jesus-followers in a city called Ephesus. Today we call that letter the book of Ephesians. For the next few weeks, we're going to explore this book to help us figure out what it meant for Christians back then, and what it means for us today.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Ephesians 1:1a.*
- Stop right there. Do you see how Paul opened his letter? "To God's holy people . . ."
- I want you to do something for me. Imagine you are one of the original recipients of this letter. To do that, here are some things to remember.
 - If you lived back then, there's a good chance you wouldn't have been able to read. So when the early church received a letter like this one, **one person would read the letter out loud and everyone else would listen.**
 - There were no printers back then, and it was expensive and time-consuming to have something copied by hand, **so you wouldn't have been able to get your own copy of this letter.** The only way you could hear or read it would have been by gathering with other Jesus-followers to hear and discuss it together.
- **The early church didn't have buildings** like many churches do today. Jesus-followers would gather in each other's homes. So try to imagine us all in a cozy living room, maybe having a meal while we read this together.

SCRIPTURE | Ephesians 1:1–5

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Ephesians 1:1–5.*
- Not only did Paul reference the Ephesians as a group, he pointed out that they were chosen to be God's sons and daughters. The Church isn't just a group of people, according to Paul. It's God's family!

SCRIPTURE | Ephesians 1:11-14

- And how do you become part of God's family?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Ephesians 1:11-14.*
- Paul said that when we hear and believe the good news of Jesus, we belong to Jesus, join God's family, and are given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

SCRIPTURE | Ephesians 1:15–23

- And what happens after we join God's family by placing our trust in Jesus?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read or summarize Ephesians 1:15–23.*
- When we join God's family through Jesus . . .

- **We join a family of people who welcome us!** When you put your trust in Jesus, know that you are joining a community of people who are so glad you're part of our family.
- **We pray for each other.** Paul modeled this with the Ephesians, and we can model it with each other.
- **Our faith grows together.** Paul asked that the Ephesians would grow in the wisdom, knowledge, and power of God, and they would do so together.
- **We become one body.** Paul said God's Church is like a body, and that Jesus is the head of that body. Think about how a body functions. To get anything done, we need all of our parts working together.
- Don't you want to be part of a community where . . .
 - You're always welcome?
 - You're prayed and cared for?
 - You can grow?
 - Your uniquenesses are celebrated?
 - That is God's dream for the Church! It always has been! The Church isn't a building or an event. It's supposed to be a family — God's family. And here's the good news for all of us: **we can be part of God's family.**

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

YOU'RE INVITED TO JOIN GOD'S FAMILY

- One of the most radical things about the Church when it first began was that everyone was invited. You could join God's family no matter who you were. If you were . . .
 - Rich or poor.
 - A man or a woman.
 - Old or young.
 - Sick or healthy.
 - Influential or an outcast.
 - A Jew or a Gentile.
 - A "good" person or a troublemaker.
- Who is welcome in God's family was radical then, and still is today. You're welcome in God's family, even if . . .
 - You don't think you look, talk, or act like you think a "church person" should.
 - You still have doubts and questions.
 - No one else in your family believes.
 - You've made some really big mistakes.
- No matter what, you're invited to join God's family. You're invited to belong here, or wherever followers of Jesus gather, because it's not about a building. God's family is way bigger than that!

YOU'RE CALLED TO ACT LIKE GOD'S FAMILY

- If you're already a follower of Jesus, are you making it easy for others to join God's family?
 - **Do you invite others to join you** not just in going to church, but in a real relationship with Jesus?
 - **Do you welcome and reach out** to people who are new or curious about following Jesus?
 - **Do you pray and care for each other?**
 - **Do you help each other grow closer to God?**
 - **Do you celebrate the unique things you and others bring to God's family**, or are you more concerned with everyone looking or acting alike?
 - Are the people you're in community with look just like you? Or do you embrace people who are different, knowing that God's family is big and diverse?
- If you've ever felt disappointed in how God's children are getting along, or you've come to church and felt alone, remember that you are part of God's family! If you're dissatisfied with the way God's family is treating one another, you can be part of the change. We need you!

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Break for discussion. If you have more than ten students, split into groups so everyone can share. The starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them if you're working only with middle schoolers.*
- ★ **Can you think of anyone who would not feel like they belong at our church? If yes, what could we do to change that?**
- **Everyone is different, but what are some of our differences that can make it difficult for us to get along?**
- **Read Galatians 3:26-28. What do you think this passage teaches us about our differences?**
- **If you're not part of God's family, what's holding you back from accepting the invitation? If you are part of God's family, how can you make it easier for others to join the squad?**

REFLECTION | Your Role in God's Family

- We're going to spend the next few weeks talking about what it means to live like God's family. But today, I want to invite you to think about your role in God's family. Do you want to join that family for the first time? Do you want to experience greater community with God's family?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print the handouts provided in your Week 1 folder and place one under each seat, along with a pen. Invite students to write down one step they can take to respond to what they just heard. This might be a salvation decision (to join God's family for the first time), or it could be a decision to be more welcoming to other members of God's family. While students reflect and write, play some instrumental music or an on-theme worship song like "Sons and Daughters," by North Point Worship.*
- As we dig into Ephesians, we'll see why Paul cared so much about people joining God's family.
- God never wants us to feel alone or like we don't belong. And you don't have to! When it comes to the Church, there are no tryouts, admissions tests, or interviews. No matter who we are, **we can be part of God's family.**