

Simple Sundays

**How Can I
Know God
Accepts Me?**



Simple Sundays

How Can I Know God Accepts Me?



How Can I Know God Accepts Me?

Session 1: Where We Are without Christ	1
Session 2: Who We Are with Christ	4
Session 3: Guided toward Acceptance	7
Session 4: Living Our Acceptance.	11
Session 5: Freedom through Christ	14

© 2018 Geneva Press

Published especially for use in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), by Geneva Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

All rights reserved. Except where permission to photocopy is expressly granted on the material, no part of these materials may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Geneva Press, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and used by permission. In some instances, adaptations have been made to a Scripture or a confession to make the language inclusive.

Excerpts from *Book of Order* and *Book of Confessions* have been used throughout this resource. Both are reprinted with permission of the Office of the General Assembly.

Every effort has been made to determine whether texts are under copyright. If through an oversight any copyrighted material has been used without permission, and the publisher is notified of this, acknowledgment will be made in future printings.



Main Idea

We all experience loneliness at times and can feel helpless to do anything about it on our own. God reaches out to us, accepts us, loves us, and moves us from isolation to community.

You Will Need

Bibles; newsprint, markers

Faith Statement

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

The Gospel of Mark very quickly brings us into the public ministry of Jesus. Powerful stories give a vivid account of his work. In one story after another, Jesus confronts unclean spirits, heals people of all different types of diseases and illnesses, and eats with sinners. These stories have one thing in common: all are stories of people who have been isolated from the rest of society. They are about people who not only need to experience God's acceptance but need to be brought back into community as well.

One such story is that of a leper whom Jesus heals. Jewish leaders, following the law as set down in Leviticus, declared lepers, such as this man, unclean. Such a declaration made the leper unfit to participate in any religious or social activity. This man was separated and cut off from both his family and his community. Any association with him would also make the other person unclean. Because of this, the usual relationships enjoyed by others were not possible for the leper. He became a discarded part of the community, broken and cast off from the rest.

The leper's perception and understanding of life was through a sense of brokenness. It was a grief that not only he felt but his entire community experienced as well. When people are excluded from community, both sides are affected by the exclusion or separation. This man desperately wanted healing; he longed for wholeness. He agonizingly desired to be included in community life and not to be excluded from it. His need to be accepted and his desire to be brought back into community was evident when he pleaded with Jesus, "If you choose, you can make me clean" (Mark 1:40).

Jesus did the one thing that no one else would do. He chose to touch the leper. He chose to make him clean. Through the simple act of a touch, Jesus not only brought the man back into community but also brought the community back into relationship with the man. When Jesus told the man to go and show himself to the priest, Jesus allowed the man to give proof to the priest of his healing. Even though Jesus cleansed the leper of his disease, the law required that a priest officially pronounce him clean.

Once a priest certified the man, he could return to the community and be included once again in all the religious and social activities. This man was able to carry out the requirements of the law because he had experienced Christ's cleansing power. Christ's miracle also brought healing to the family members and friends who formerly were denied association with the leprous man. The reconciling power of Christ to bring together that which is broken miraculously restored wholeness to the leper and to all those who knew him.

You and Your Youth

This session begins a study on acceptance by having the youth identify isolation in their own lives as well as the lives of others. The biblical story shows us how Jesus reached into the leper's isolation and reconnected him to the community. It is God who connects us; but perhaps God desires to work through you to bring youth who face isolation and difficulty in relationships back into community. In preparation, take time to center yourself in prayer, asking for God's direction in your life. Then pray for members of the group by name that the Holy Spirit might illumine their hearts with a saving knowledge of God's acceptance.



Enter
Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Name Game

Sit in a circle. One person starts by saying his or her own name and a word beginning with the same letter that says something about them. For example, "Mike likes music." Going clockwise around the circle, the next person repeats the previous person's name and description and then adds his or her own. For example, "Mike likes music; Sandra is sixteen." The third person repeats the first two names, then adds one more: "Mike likes music; Sandra is sixteen; and Brian plays baseball." It gets harder as you go around the circle. Others in the group can help remember the list. End by having everyone say the whole sequence in order.

The Secret

The point of this activity is for everyone to guess "the secret." Set up the game by secretly choosing a random letter. Tell another person the secret letter and privately share the point of the game: describe a nonexistent object using only adjectives that begin with the chosen letter. To begin, give a one-sentence description of a nonexistent object to the whole group. For example, if B were the chosen letter, you might say, "The object is beautiful." The other person who knows the secret letter might respond: "I have one too, mine is baggy, and it is beautiful." The rest of the group members have to make trial-and-error statements about the secret. Only responders who use the secret letter have it right. Play until others begin to catch on to the secret. Then discuss the following questions:

- How did you feel when you did not know "the secret"?
- How did you feel when you figured it out?
- How did the game highlight what it means to be left out?

Opening Prayer
Jesus, you came to earth as evidence of God's love. Throughout your earthly life, you chose to receive those who were in isolation and restore their lives. As our now risen Lord, you offer us this same restoration. Help us look to you for healing and wholeness so that we might serve you with our lives. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Study the Bible

Bibles

Before reading Mark 1:40–45, introduce the passage. You may do this by reading the paragraph below, or you may put it in your own words using information from Background.

Through the simple act of a touch, Jesus not only brought a leprous man back into community but also brought the community back into relationship with the man. Though the leper bore the greatest burden and brokenness of his disease, the whole community shared his pain and brokenness. We observe social isolation along these lines today when we avoid contact with AIDS patients or other terminally ill persons. When we exclude anyone from community, we are all affected by the segregation. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together," and yet we often prefer to quarantine people with an illness, a deformity, or a disability rather than deal with the issue of suffering that their physical condition makes visible for us. Jesus' healing of the leper's skin was miraculous, but of equal significance was the healing and restoration of the community.

Form teams to discuss the questions as outlined in the chart below.

Biblical Insights	Personal Insights	Putting It Together
What do you imagine it felt like to live as a leper?	How have you felt isolated?	What is the best thing you can do to move beyond isolation?
What do you imagine was the worst part of being isolated?	What is the worst part of it?	What can connect you to someone else?
What did this person do to reach beyond isolation?	What things can keep you isolated?	What things help you move out of isolation?

Entering the Story

Bibles

Entering the Story is a tool for focusing our prayers on Christ. The exercise becomes prayer because in placing one's self in the story alongside Jesus one can hear, see, and experience the message of the Gospel firsthand. With the help of the Holy Spirit, these powerful encounters with Jesus in the Gospels can be as real for us today as they were for those with whom Jesus was physically present.

Through a drama of the story in Mark 1:40–45, the group can experience entering the narrative. Identify and assign people from the narrative, and then ask the group to work on their own to determine how the story will be enacted.

After presenting the drama, follow up with discussion. Invite each participant to describe three aspects of their experience: (a) how they felt; (b) what moved them; and (c) what insights they gained in playing their role. Most important, share insights about Jesus from the perspective of the person they played.

Close with a prayer, visualizing a replay of the drama. During a time of silence, imagine you are with Jesus in this story. Talk to Jesus as you would a close friend. Notice how Jesus responds.



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If the youth do not seem to relate to these situations, then modify them to make them relevant.

Youth Issue

Set up the scenario below and then discuss the following questions:

You tend to be more of an introvert than an extrovert. You prefer a lot of time to yourself. You like to read and rent videos to watch at home. You have people you like to talk to online, but you don't really have a group of friends you hang out with. You don't like other people telling you that something is wrong with you or that if you don't get out more, you'll turn into a hermit. You do feel lonely sometimes, but you figure God creates some of us to be introverts and some to be extroverts, so you just accept who you are.

- How can a person like this feel less isolated?
- What can one personality type learn from the other?

Action Steps

Discuss together the things you could do for someone who is in isolation. After a few minutes of discussion, reflect on a personal plan of action for reaching out to others. Share these with one another.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Newsprint, markers

Share words or thoughts from today's session that youth found to be personally significant or spiritually meaningful. Write these on newsprint and keep a list for each session so that you can review it after all five sessions are complete. Close with the Lord's Prayer.