



Digital Discipleship: Connecting College Students

Often college students are one of the most underserved groups in terms of engagement and discipleship in faith communities. That may be due to a congregation not having the volunteer, staff person or resources to create a ministry targeting the needs of this demographic, or the clergy and lay leadership just not knowing where to start. Rev. Hugh Griffith, campus minister at MSU Wesley Foundation and Katie Heckel, associate campus minister at MSU Wesley Foundation have created a blueprint for connecting college students as a resource to aid your Digital Discipleship. This blueprint for college students is easily adaptable to your church's size, culture and context.

Connect Now

1. Host a virtual event for your college students in late July/early August. Use [The Bible Project video](#) on justice along with Bible study and group discussion guides. The event could be adapted to be an in-person or virtual gathering. This resource works for groups as small as one to three students as well as for larger groups. For a fun twist, you might end the event with a virtual game. [Katie Heckel](#) or [Hugh Griffith](#) are available to give support as you implement this idea.
2. Connect your students to Wesley Foundations. Provide your students' names and contact information to Wesley directors using this central student registry link: <https://bit.ly/2WbnK8g>.

Stay Engaged Through the Fall

1. Check in with your college students in early October. You might send them a care package or a gift card.
2. Link for tips on engaging students on social media: <https://bit.ly/2BkeFD0>.

Reconnect Over Christmas Break

1. Take advantage of this upcoming longer-than-usual Christmas break by reconnecting with your college students. Due to COVID-19, Mississippi colleges and universities will finish the fall semester before Thanksgiving, which means your students will be home for six weeks.
2. Consider using The Bible Project's four-part Advent series following the same format as the summer event. Find it here: <https://bit.ly/2WFQzd8>.

Congregational
Care and the
Coronavirus



Connect and Engage with College Students Blueprint

Summer 2020 – Event Preparation

- Gather a list of college students. Identify the influencers who naturally draw others to participate
- Share your vision for the event with student leaders, and pick a date with input from your students
- We suggest doing this event by the end of July before students return to campus
- Decide if it will be a virtual event or an in-person event
- Personally invite students
- Promote the event via social media
- Create a GroupMe for communication about the event. If you set this up now, you'll have a good way to reconnect with them later.
- Ask influencers to do personal outreach and promotion about the event
- Prepare for the event:
 - If online: Get familiar with Zoom or other platforms
 - In person: projector, computer or TV to watch video with sound
 - Get familiar with The Bible Project's video on justice <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A14THPoc4-4> and Bible study materials
 - Plan leadership: Decide who will facilitate Bible study/discussion?
 - If virtual, give an orientation to Zoom—how to mute/unmute yourself and using the chat feature

Event Material

Topic: JUSTICE

Resource: The Bible Project <https://bibleproject.com/explore/justice/>

What is biblical justice? How do we achieve it?

Small talk at beginning: If you could fix any problem in the world, which one would you fix?

Part 1: Opening

Our world looks so different from the way it looked a few months ago. As we've all worked together to curb the spread of this virus, all of our lives have been changed—but not all to the same degree. Our most vulnerable neighbors are seeing devastating effects from this unprecedented time. Also, there is a collective voice of our Black brothers and sisters rising up speaking of injustice, and maybe we are hearing this cry for the first time. As we consider biblical justice, may we be open to hear God's call to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God."

Tonight, we're focusing on the theme of justice in the story of the Bible. In Genesis 1, all humans are created to be the image of God and to rule the world together on God's behalf. However, history has proven that we all find it very difficult to treat each other with sacred dignity, especially in moments of economic crisis. **What would it look like to recapture God's passion for justice in our own day?**

- How have you personally experienced or observed suffering or loss during these COVID-19 days?
- How has your idea of justice or injustice shifted in light of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Rayshard Brooks?

Part 2: Watch JUSTICE video | <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A14THPoc4-4>

Use the share screen feature if you're on Zoom.



Part 3: Read and Discuss

There are many in our world today who are suffering, but the people who suffer most are those who are already economically vulnerable, often for reasons beyond their own control. This is true even in times of the Bible. This is why in the Old Testament, God gave laws to the people of Israel for looking after the most vulnerable—making sure everyone had access to employment and to food. All of this is rooted within the Biblical belief that every human bears the image of God and, therefore, has sacred dignity and value regardless of social and economic status. This is why when Jesus was announcing God's kingdom, He went first to the poor and the sick. Jesus shared God's heartbeat for the vulnerable. So this concern has always been at the heart and movement of Jesus.

Read Deuteronomy 24:17-22

In passages like this one, we can see that God deeply cares for the vulnerable—the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. These laws address equality and care for the vulnerable. Notice that the motivation given is, “you used to be slaves in Egypt.” In other words, we should use our freedom to work for the freedom and justice of others.

- What stood out to you as you read this passage?
- Who are the vulnerable today?
- How does recognizing that you have also been redeemed by Jesus impact how you think about yourself and others?

Read Isaiah 58:1-14

In this passage, we find that God's people are neglecting the vulnerable in their communities, while continuing in their rhythms of worship—the Sabbath, prayer and fasting. However, what God cares about most is that His people do justice and care for the oppressed in their community.

- Did anything in this passage surprise you?
- In what ways do we sometimes focus on external practices rather than what matters most to God?
- What injustice grieves you the most right now? What do you think God thinks and feels about this?

Read James 1:26-2:5

James describes genuine devotion to God as being aware of the needs of vulnerable people in our communities and doing something about it. He talks about how we are easily blind to inequality and sometimes even play a part in it. James actually sees the poor as having a privileged position because they can more easily see their need for God's provision and grace.

- Who around you might need your support at this time when they feel vulnerable to the pandemic or to racism?
- Where do you find hope in light of the overwhelming reality of injustice in the world and even in ourselves?

The bottom line is that God cares deeply about the vulnerable. So who in your life is vulnerable to COVID-19 and to racism? ***What can you do to extend justice to these who are vulnerable?*** Followers of Jesus have a very unique opportunity to display honesty, courage and the generous justice of God Himself in very generous and practical ways to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Close in Prayer

Part 4 [Optional]: Play an online game

You might recruit a student to lead a game. Be sure to use the family friendly options. Consider the following resources.

- Jackbox - <https://bit.ly/3fMSHYg>
- Quizup - <https://www.quizup.com/en>
- Playing Cards - <http://playingcards.io>



Troubleshooting

- **What if we only have one college student?** You can view the justice video and walk through the Bible study conversationally over lunch or coffee with a student, and that one student will feel like the most important person in the world because you did that just for her or him!
- **What if only one person shows up?** Carry on in a conversational style.
- **What if nobody shows up?** The success of this event doesn't depend on how many students show up. Just offering this event is a success, and even if nobody shows up this time, maybe they will participate next time.
- **Keep in mind that students are tired of "virtual" events.** Another Zoom call is not an attraction; community and intentional relationships are attractive.
- If you're offering an in-person event, **remember social distancing and hand hygiene**, of course.
- Be motivated by the fact that **students value intergenerational relationships**.
- **Remember to treat college students like adults** instead of relating to them as youth.
- If you have any other questions, **feel free to reach out to Hugh Griffith or Katie Heckel at hughgriffith2@gmail.com and katieheckel2@gmail.com.**

[Click here](#) to download a graphic for "Do Justice." Fill in the blanks with your information.