

Belonging 2023

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10-1-23

Every year we talk about why we should belong...our Village “membership” is yearly which means that every year you decide if these are the people you want to do life with. Some of us are in different places and aren’t ready to make a covenant. However, you can participate in the “belonging” art projects with or without signing the covenant. There are about 140 people here and next week we will all come together in one service.

Let’s talk about some aspects of belonging:

Loneliness

The surgeon general says there is an epidemic of loneliness in our country

Loneliness has become an epidemic in U.S.
Widespread loneliness in the U.S. poses health risks as deadly as smoking a dozen cigarettes daily, costing the health industry billions of dollars annually, the U.S. surgeon general said Tuesday in declaring the latest public health epidemic



You can feel disconnected and lonely in any place, even in your marriage or here at church.

In Gen 1:18, God created Adam and Eve and said it wasn’t good for man to be alone. *We were created to be together, not alone.*

Research shows that Americans, who have become less engaged with worship houses, community organizations and even their own family members in recent decades, have steadily reported an increase in feelings of loneliness. The number of single households has also doubled over the last 60 years.



Physical Contact

Lower cortisol levels are observed after hugging, resulting in decreased stress.

Physical benefits include minor reductions in blood pressure and heart rate.

Hugs offer emotional and psychological advantages such as a sense of connection and belonging.



We were designed for physical contact. We are not really a “hugging” church but physical touch is important! Jesus often touched people.

We are designed to be touched! In Matt 8:3, Jesus touched the leper and he was clean. There is something healing about touch!

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is linked to improved emotional well-being, including reduced anxiety, depression, and anger.

Some studies suggest that forgiveness can lead to better physical health, including lower blood pressure and a stronger immune system.

Forgiving others can improve relationships by reducing tension and fostering trust, understanding, and empathy.



"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." - Matthew 6:14

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." - Ephesians 4:32

"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." - Colossians 3:13



Individuals who practice forgiveness often report experiencing increased feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy.

Forgiveness has been associated with better cognitive function, including improved focus and problem-solving skills.



Jesus said forgiveness is important: Scripture clearly says forgiveness is key to our health!

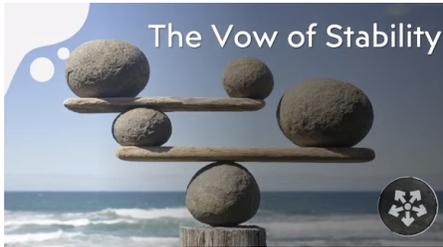
If you decide to belong to the Village, does that mean you will not be lonely or get more hugs or that people will forgive you? MAYBE this will happen...but the truth is:

We will all fail you and disappoint you and say things we shouldn't say. Belonging is messy!

So why belong? The state of the world is lonely, physically isolating, and doesn't forgive. We all bring our messiness into this community: this is not a club but a community that has arranged its life around Jesus and wants to follow him.

We live in a culture that doesn't know how to interact with each other. But your belonging here can change this. Meeting Jesus changes things!

St. Francis was a monk in the AD 400s...at that time, he noticed that people were aimless wanderers and so he came up with a "vow of instability." This really defines the Village!



We vow to remain **all our life** with our local community. We **live** together, **pray** together, **work** together, **relax** together. We give up the temptation to move from place to place in search of an ideal situation. Ultimately there is no escape from oneself, and the idea that things would be better someplace else is usually an illusion. And when interpersonal conflicts arise, we have a great incentive to work things out and restore peace. This means learning the practices of love: acknowledging one's own offense, giving up one's preferences, **forgiving**.

Don't worry! We aren't asking this for the rest of your life but **for one year**. This vow invites you to live together and work things out, giving up your own preferences for things.

Last year, Rod retired after 22 years of planting this church and practicing this every day. This is stability. Many of you have moved into neighborhoods that foster this: places for the wandering world to meet Jesus and meet Jesus's people who live life by offering forgiveness and listening ears. This stability gives the people around us the opportunity to be healed, touched, forgiven, known, seen, and loved. This alleviates loneliness: but I repeat: this is messy! Come take the vow of stability and be a part of this. Your belonging, however, may feel like sandpaper sometimes.

With this idea in mind, let's read John 3:16 and 17 to give you an idea of my longings for this year.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

No matter where you are in your walk, I want us to have God's heart for ourselves and for our neighbors. All of us have a short 15-second testimony that communicates how chaos and darkness were overcome by light in our life: God intervened and brought peace. We want to bring this story to your neighbors (who can be co-workers, family, or anyone adjacent to you). We want to move toward this awareness of God's heart for our neighbors.

Act 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. **33** With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all **34** that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales **35** and put it at the

apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. **36** Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), **37** sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

I want us to be of one heart and one mind. I am impressed that **no one had needs**. When there was a need, someone even sold a house to provide for the needs of others. My hope is that as you belong here, you will be aware of needs within the community and the needs of your neighbors and that you will be willing to let go of what you have for their benefit. You can give just a fish and a loaf of bread and watch Jesus multiply it!

Hebrews 13:17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

We started the year talking about radical discipleship. Some passages talk about obedience of leaders but this infers being persuaded to follow them. **Submit means to fit yourself to them:** come alongside your leaders and help them to make the mission happen and move it forward. This is what you are being invited into: fit yourself along Mark, Michael, and me. Submitting to your elders will actually bring peace to your neighbors!

Practical ways to be involved:

- **Come on Sunday and Volunteer**
- **Join a Pilgrim Group:** In these groups, you will learn to listen to the Holy Spirit how to process difficult things and work them out in your life with the support of your community.
- **Practice Hospitality:** Have someone over for coffee or call them and pray for them. Or send them random checks in the mail: Be creative!
- **Start a Neighborhood Outpost:** Invite people to your house and pray for your neighborhood once a month.
- **Give:** we have three pastors who shepherd you and care for you. We aren't paid as much as our counterparts in the world. Running this building and paying the electric bill take money.
- **Ask How You Can Help:** Ask a leader or elder, ask them how you can help.

