

Why Belong?

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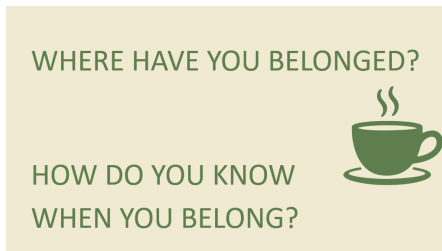


I have belonged at the Village for 25 years: in fact, I am an expert in belonging to the Village. I have belonged my adult life and I've given time, energy, money, and resources here. I would not ask you to do anything that I haven't already done!



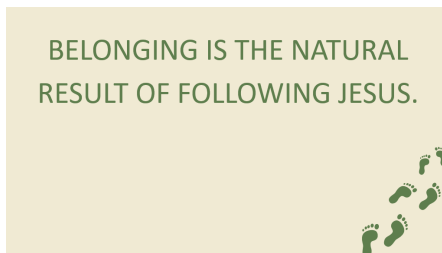
I am in the R-hand corner of this photo; I'm in middle school here and these are some of my friends from the volleyball team; there were no try-outs. It was open to anyone who wanted to belong. The rule of my coach was that you couldn't call anyone a best friend because we were all best friends. We had uniforms and we practiced playing volleyball together. It was exhilarating to be on a team and travel together and give high-fives: I felt like I belonged. I don't

remember if we won any games: all I remember was being on the team.



I'm curious where you might have belonged in your life: track, swim team, dorm, knitting club, cub scouts, choir, family.

How do you know when you belong? Commitment, people are glad to see you, shared memories, you are in charge of something, people miss you when you're not there, you have a key to the building.



I deeply believe belonging is the natural and unique result of following Jesus.



I'd like to take a quick biblical overview of belonging from the books of Ephesians and Acts in various translations.

Ephesians 1:4-5

NLT

Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

Belonging originated in the heart of God the Father. God wanted us to belong to him and to create a people who belong to each other. It doesn't originate with us but with God.

How did he do this? Belief on Jesus gives us access.

Ephesians 1:7

NLT

He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.

Forgiveness opens the door. The Holy Spirit makes us able to belong to each other.

Ephesians 1:13b

NLT

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

Ephesians 3:6

NLT

And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Jesus Christ.

Both Jews and everyone who belong to Jesus even though they have nothing in common with each other: young, old, rich, poor, different nationalities, etc.

Ephesians 3:10

NLT

God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

God formed the church from people all over the world who have entered his family to display his wisdom to the whole earth. You might not see it today but it is there.

Ephesians 4:1-3

NLT

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

How do we live out this calling: with humility, gentleness, and patience: by getting along with each other. This unity is not one we create but the Holy spirit creates it and we participate in it.



BELONGING IS EMPOWERED



Some of the things we see the Holy Spirit do in the church are demonstrated by my middle school experience. We were a team but also buddies even though we had other friends. We would go shopping and to each other's houses. In this photo, my teammates kidnapped me to take me to breakfast. This happened because our moms and coach were coming up with ideas and transporting us. Similarly, when we gather it's the Holy Spirit who gives us unique gifts and coordinates these gifts to make us into

Christ's image as we enable each other.

BELONGING IS THE NATURAL
RESULT OF FOLLOWING
JESUS...

AND THOSE WHO FOLLOW
JESUS ARE A SENT PEOPLE



Belonging is the natural result of following Jesus and empowered by the HS.

We aren't just buddies for fun though: we have a mission and we are being sent into the world as Jesus moves into the world through us. Let's look at how this plays out in the ACTS.

The gospel is communicated

Acts 2:36

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the church was born, the gospel was communicated. A story of redemption that began at creation is still going on. Vs. 36 is a summary of this.

People trust in Christ
& receive forgiveness

Acts 2:37-38a

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

People trust Christ and receive forgiveness for their sins.

The Holy Spirit comes

Acts 2:38b-39

"And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The result is the gift of the HS. When the message goes forth, 3,000 people believe and the church is born.

People belong

Acts 2:42-47a

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

The people belonged and worshipped together: they belonged to God together.

The Gospel is communicated: they become a witness to the world around them. The Gospel is communicated verbally and more people come to Christ.

The gospel is communicated

Acts 2:47b

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Even when they are on trial, the leaders see something unique about them: The Holy Spirit testifies the identity of Christ to the world through these people

WHY THE VILLAGE ?

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Acts 17:26

Let's talk about why you would belong at the Village: VS 26 is a history of mankind: he created people and decided where they should land. I believe God has placed you here and has drawn you into community here. God made it clear to me at the start of the Village that he wanted to create this place: I watched him raise us leaders and pastors and servants and people who were good at listening to each other. Maybe we didn't even know this was a church at first but Jesus said otherwise.

JESUS CREATED THE VILLAGE

Healing the City
Eating Together
Creativity
Common Practice

I have experienced **healing** here: healing messy and it doesn't always go the way we want it to.

I love that we **eat together**. What I have seen this do for me is to give me friendships with men and people who are different from me that I would not have otherwise: it's a natural context to hang out. There is space to sit and talk with children or

people much older. We learn what is happening in each other's lives and support each other.

I also love that this is a place of **creativity**: Could we have couches? Could we write our music from Scripture that fights the false beliefs we carry around?

Common Practices: Could we eat together? Could we practice Lent and Advent together? We have also developed Trinitarian prayer and the Hotseat where we listen and point each other to Jesus. Through these things, we can be disciplined by each other.

THE COVENANT



Another covenant story: 28 years ago my husband and I bought our house with Keith & Julie Brunson. At that time, we committed to live with each other for two years, which seemed then like enough time. I didn't know then that buying a house was like a covenant: We committed to owning the house together. I also didn't know then that it's really hard to sell a house. The covenant we made created stability and longevity and a reason to work out our differences together. It did

something beautiful, too: it was the place where the Village started, where neighbors and relatives would gather and come and go. It was an anchor for this community and other

communities around it. This was the result of us making the covenant when we bought that house.

Likewise, we also have a covenant here at the Village that we sign yearly if you can sign the statement of belief and commit your resources and time and take ownership of this community. You create a grounded place where people can come and go and participate at different levels. People from the outside world can come and people can be sent out.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED
AND WHAT I'VE SEEN
(2 ATHLETIC ANALOGIES)

I have 2 athletic analogies (and I'm not an athlete):

SET YOUR STANCE.
SWING.



1. Two weeks ago, I played Pickleball for the first time. I was flying all over the court, swinging high and low and sometimes even hitting the ball. I also landed on my L ankle really hard. When this happened, I noticed that the other people had their knees bent: they were **grounded and ready to hit the ball**. They knew that you needed to have your stance set. I am inviting you to do this: **set your stance**. Do you have both feet under you here or do you have one foot out the door? Are your knees bent and ready or are you laying in a hammock ready to hit the ball (because the ball WILL come). When the ball comes at you, Jesus is saying "swing" and it could be that you will start to have longer conversations when you're out in public or start a neighborhood prayer group. You need to not be flying all over the court.

LET'S FOLLOW JESUS
TOGETHER!

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2a

2. The next year in front of us, we mark out a race in front of us. I have seen this past year that people confess sin and make choices that reflect that. They try new things as they throw off things that formerly hindered them. They have a stance that is ready for the race that is coming. I invite you into this as we follow Jesus together. Will you belong?



