

Better Together, 9/8/19, Hebrews 10:24-25

- A stay-at-home parent whose primary human contact throughout the day with her 2 and 4-year-old preschoolers.
- A girl who has hundreds of followers on Instagram who like her selfies but isn't sure she could name one close friend who knows the real her.
- A recently widowed woman trying to figure out how to fill the silence of a home that used to be filled with conversation and laughter.
- A student struggling to maintain faith while desperately wanting to fit in with the kids at school.
- A busy, middle-aged couple who feel more like business partners than lovers, attempting to manage careers and kids in sports. They may share the same bed but are miles apart relationally.
- A man who thought by his mid 30's he would have grown out of his porn habit but now finds himself married with kids and fearful for anyone to know.
- A young couple starting out their careers in a new town hoping to find a church that fits.
- A single woman who feels overlooked in the sea of families at church, wondering if anyone sees her or cares.

All these snapshots are people I encounter here at church. And I could give you many more scenarios. What is the common human need that each of these people have? **The need to belong.** Sociologists describe healthy belonging as the convergence of four basic elements.

Security: A place where you feel comfortable, safe and loved.

Authenticity: A place where you feel known, where you can take off the mask and be raw and real with people you trust. **Cheers, Friends, Spongebob...**

Maturity: A place where you can emotionally, relationally or spiritual be nurtured. You learn to become the better version of yourself.

Mission: A place where your shared experience can drive deeper purpose in your life. **Marines, Marching band.**

What ought to have all 4 of these elements of healthy belonging? **The Church!**

Jesus Christ designed his church with healthy belonging in at heart. This is why emphasize this and strive for it so much. One of our core values.

Meaningful Membership & Community

God designed us to live in community not isolation and our desire is for everyone to be connected in a caring, biblical community. We are committed to biblical stewardship of our time, talents and treasures both individually and corporately. We will strive for "100% spiritual employment" because the church matures as each member does its part to live out the "one another" commands in Scripture.

I want to talk about healthy belonging today because it is my conviction that it can make or break us. It can be the difference between a thriving marriage and one that falls apart. It can be the difference between drifting through life and discovering God's calling on your life. It can be the difference between finding belonging in very unhealthy places that could shipwreck your

life and finding belonging in a healthy place that can draw you closer to God. We want to talk about the struggle of belonging, restoration of belonging, the reasons to pursue belonging.

The Struggle: Cigna report last year- 47% of Americans are lonely and they are now labeling loneliness as a health epidemic. It is connected to diabetes, heart disease and depression. They liken it to the affect of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Who is most at risk? According to the studies, the youngest generations. Sad irony is that this is the most connected generation through social media. But all generations experience loneliness and this just one of symptom of dysfunctional belonging.

Why are we often so reluctant, why does it seem so elusive and even when we get it does it sometimes disappoint? We could point to lots of social and emotional factors in our modern society- that certainly contributes to it, but ultimately it finds its source in something far more ancient.

The Fall- Genesis 3 introduced the breakdown of true belonging.

Insecurity replaces security- Fear of being exposed or exploited.

Distrust and Pretense replaces Authenticity, there was distrust and covering up so no one would see who they really are.

Instead of Maturity, there was isolation and dysfunction

Instead of Mission, there was lostness, wondering and idolatry.

It is why some of us have had a bad experience or conflict that has led us to avoid belonging. It is why we protect ourselves by putting on a mask. It is why we can be surrounded by people, be in church, be in a small group or even a marriage and never actually be known. It is why we are prone to individualism and isolation. It is why we busy ourselves with work, hobbies, and entertainment to avoid relationships.

Jesus Christ Restores Belonging.

The Security that we long for- Jesus provides. Colossians 1:21-22

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

The Authenticity we long for- Jesus provides. 1 Peter 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

The Maturity we long for- Jesus provides. Ephesians 4:15-16

¹⁵ *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.* ¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

The Mission we long for- Jesus provides. Ephesians 2:10 *For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Only Jesus can carry the weight of our need for belonging. Only he can satisfy the deepest desires and expectations. And if we search to fulfill our ultimate belonging in a person, or group, it will ultimately disappoint us because it wasn't designed to carry the weight. We will smother the relationship, we will get disillusioned, we will turn the relationship into an idol. Only when Jesus is at the center of our belonging, we can truly find healthy belonging with one another.

This kind of belonging described in Ephesians 2 is what we like to call Biblical Community. Let me share with you [3 Reasons to Invest in Biblical Community](#) at Brandywine. Some of you might not be convinced that you need this.

1. The ultimate meaning of your life is loving relationships.

The need for belonging isn't explained in the Darwinian theory. Belonging genes didn't evolved in humans for the survival of our species. No, we have belonging genes because they were given to us by a personal, relational, God dwells eternally in community Father, Son, Holy Spirit who made mankind. Genesis 1:26 Let us make man in our own image and likeness. We are image bearers of God. So that through relationships, the giving and receiving of love, of mutual trust and interdependence, we would bear the image of God in our world. This is ultimately why Jesus says, they will know you are Christians by our love. But he also created us with the need for belonging because he knows how vital it is to our flourishing. The God who created looked at all creation and said that the one thing that was not good was man was alone, was isolated. Genesis 2:18, He needed belonging. Yes, he gave that in the form of a marriage partner, but marriage is just one way in which humans might experience belonging. Through family, through friendship.

Matthew 22:37, When Jesus was asked the greatest command, love God and love each other- the purpose of your life boils down to those two things...

2. The New Testament Commands it. If you are a Christian, you need to understand that this isn't optional part of our faith. One another passages.

Where we love one another, care for one another, serve one another, admonish, show forbearance to and forgive one another; where we keep fervent in our love for one another, are hospitable towards one another and where we employ our gifts in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; where we greet one another, are of the same mind toward one another, are kind to each other and speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; where we build up, comfort, pray for, encourage, live in peace with and seek after that which is good for one another. It is where we clothe ourselves in humility toward one another, where we live in subjection to one another, stimulate one another on to love and good deeds, confess sins to one another, live in peace with one another and give preference to one another in honor; where we encourage one another day after day lest any of us become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Where we love one another just as he commanded us.

3. Spiritual progress is a community project.

Isolation has a green-house effect on our dysfunction and sin. We have an enemy that loves isolation.

1 Peter 5:8

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Example of Zebra tracked by Lion.

Biblical community is like that herd of zebras all moving together, who had each other's backs... a means of grace that God uses to help curb our propensity towards sinfulness, self-deceit and destructiveness.

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

True stories I've collected over the years former church and here at BVBC that give you a snapshot of biblical community.

-My car broke down and I couldn't afford to fix it, I asked for prayer from my small group because I was so stressed out, they showed up the next week with \$1000,

-When my wife struggled to even get out of bed because of her struggle with Lyme's Disease, our community group brought meals, sent letters, went through the hassle of always meeting our apartment even though it was cramped, and what impacted me the most is that when I would have to go to work and Lindsay was often left alone, women from church would take shifts coming over to the house to have lunch with her.

-When my wife died, I thought I would never be able to smile again. While life will never be the same, my church community has been a source of strength, willing to cry with me, friendship. We went on a recent trip together and I found myself laughing...and it signaled to me that it is going to be OK.

-I was addicted to pornography and knew I couldn't break the habit alone, but the thought of telling anyone was overwhelming. But after several months in my mens small group, for the first time in my life I felt like I was in a band of brothers, who I could trust with anything. I finally told them and, while I'm not perfect, I have learned how to struggle well and find victory.

-I am the kind of person that questions everything and am very cautious to form relationships. I think most people are intimidated by my guarded demeanor, skeptical questions and maybe they think I'm secretly judging them...some of the time I am. But mostly, I'm afraid that to be vulnerable or put myself in a place to be let down. But people have been very patient with me and have gone out of their way to want to know me. I received my first invitation to dinner in 10 years.

Are you in biblical community? **Security, Authenticity, Maturity, Mission**

Where to pursue Biblical Community.

Membership

Small Groups

Christian Education Classes