

“Belong Together”

In Common Sermon Series | Week Two | Newbreak Church

September 4th, 2022

Newbreak's Sermon Study Guide is an in-house resource that serves sermon-based Life Groups and/or individuals who want to reflect further on how the message contributes to our spiritual formation.

In this week's study, we talk about the value of belonging together as a church family.

Icebreakers for Life Groups

- Do you get excited for football season to start? Why or why not?
- When was a time that you experienced a really meaningful community? Tell us more about it.

Going Deeper Into the Message

How can experience the kind of belonging that God wants for me?

Read Acts 2:42–47; 4:32; 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Point 1 – Open my life to other people.

It was close to a decade ago. A man was having Thanksgiving dinner at a breakfast diner alone... even pausing right there, no one should be eating Thanksgiving alone. He could not quite get comfy in the booth, and he could not quite figure out when asking for another refill of coffee was too much. The waitress came up to him and asked, “Can I get you anything else, Sir?” At that moment he realized that none of the people around him even knew his name. The depth of the relationship he had with anyone present in that room was displayed as being called “sir.” A formality for those who are anonymous guests in a diner.

The man thought to himself: "How can I feel so alone when I am surrounded by so many people?"

Sometimes the worst loneliness happens in a crowd.

Solitude is a gift; loneliness is a pitfall. You can have thousands of “friends” on Facebook and “followers” on Instagram and still have no people in your life that truly know who you are and what is going on in your life. You might as well be called "sir" or "ma'am" and that be a reflection of the depth of relationships in your life.

This isn't about personality type—of course some of us find more energy in connection with people, and others are more comfortable being alone and don't need as much relational time. We typically label that “extroverts/introverts,” although it's more complex than that. Regardless, we all thrive when we have meaningful relationships.

We know that.

But do we *know* that the church is meant to be the epitome of a thriving and relational community? Do we *know* that the Church was once considered a family? What if the Church was a multi-ethnic, multi-generational family of people who all are bound by the saving grace of Jesus Christ the Lord?

More than being some "organization" or a "non-profit," the Church is a family—one that is expanded across the globe and across generations.

How might the way we look for community change by changing our perception of the local church community that we find ourselves in?

One thing is for certain, there would be no one having Thanksgiving dinner at a diner by themselves. You see, there is nothing wrong with the concept of the nuclear family. Family members ought to be cared for! But what about those who are part of church communities who lack family? Maybe they are widowed or divorced. Perhaps they lost their parents earlier than expected. Maybe they are single (by choice or circumstance). Or maybe they are relocated to the area and don't even have a friend.

There are a variety of scenarios, but all have this in common—there are people needing for the Church to recover her roots as a place where people are treated like—and even become—family.

“The earliest Christians lived as a single family. When you live together as a family under one roof, you don't see this chair, this table, this bottle of milk, this loaf of bread, as ‘mine’ rather than ‘yours’. The breadwinners in the household don't see the money they bring in as ‘theirs’ rather than belonging to the whole household. That's part of what it means to be a family.” – N.T. Wright

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Opening our lives to each other (as in the passages above) requires us to broaden how we see the Church as a family. How has this conversation challenged your thinking on this topic? Do you lean towards embracing this language and the implications of it? Or are you hesitant to adopt the view that the Church is one large family?
- Thinking about your own life, would you describe your friendships and relationships as being “open” to one another? Or are you more closed off from others than you should be? What might be a challenge for you in this week’s message?
- Opening our lives involves a healthy dose of vulnerability. What does being vulnerable look like for you right now? What might be some helpful ways to share more with others? What might be some helpful guidelines on how to express vulnerability over time and not all at once?

How can experience the kind of belonging that God wants for me?

Read Acts 2:46; 5:42

Point 2 – Open my home and my table to become a space where people encounter God.

The home is most natural place of community since God designed family to be a community. And then our family community extends to our community with other people who call Jesus their Lord. In essence, historically speaking, the home was the place where most ministry took place because the home was valued as a space for people to come—belong—and be loved. The Holy Spirit certainly moved powerfully in these spaces where the Church lived most of their common life—yes, even outside what we might consider the “church building.”

We often hear the phrase, “Mi casa es su casa” (translation: “my house is your house”). But do we mean that? Is that something we say to be courteous or do we actually open up our homes to have the life of the Church extend beyond Sundays? Rosaria Butterfield, in her magnificent book [*The Gospel Comes with a Housekey*](#) speaks of her transformative journey from LGBT activist to devout Christian—with one of the crucial parts of her journey being shown radical hospitality. At one point she says this: **“Our homes are not our castles. Indeed, they are not even ours.”**

“Timeout! I pay a mortgage, the house is mine.” Many might be thinking... But whether you own a property or rent one, there needs to be a radical reorientation on how we see the place we call “home.” It’s not our castle where we hideout from the world. Sure, it is the place we can take off our shoes and be most comfortable and true to who we are—but that does not negate the fact that even our “homes” are something God calls us to steward. Everything belongs to God, ultimately ([Psalm 24:1](#) reminds us of that!).

How am I stewarding the home that God has granted me to have? **We want to inspire you toward an even greater vision of how a Jesus-centered community can be found and fostered in the most intimate place where you dwell—home!** The opportunities of this are endless, and again, if you are looking for a resource, check out [Rosaria’s book](#). For now, we simply want to get you to retrieve the inspirational vision the early Church left for us, visible even in the pages of Scripture. Homes can be a place where people encounter God. The question is, are we willing to facilitate it? Are we willing to open our lives, our homes, and our tables to others so that Jesus-centered community can thrive?

When Jesus-centered community is practiced, our spirits are **fed** with truth, our stomachs are **filled** with bread, and our hearts are **full** of gratitude.

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- What makes “home” such a comforting place to be ourselves?
- Hospitality has nothing to do with the size of your home. In fact, *hospitality has more to do with how you make others feel at home when they are around you!* How might you practice hospitality using the spaces you are in already?
- What might it look like to invite others into your home? How can you challenge yourself to practice more hospitality in the coming weeks, months, and years?

Memory Verse: 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NLT) We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God’s Good News but our own lives, too.

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

How are you going to think or live differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?

How does this week's message shape or nurture your relationship with God?

BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids in a way that they would relate to or understand?