



WEEK 2 - BELONG

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... how did you find The Connection? Are you an O.G., with the launch team from the beginning? Did you stumble up on our online worship while hiding from The 'Rona? Are you a recent addition, bouncing around our many worship locations in the last two years? Ready, Go!

OPENING PRAYER

God of Connection, thank your for giving us a place of love and support, and community of faith to lift us up and fight alongside us.

INTRODUCTION

We began last week talking about the hurdles that can prevent us from fully committing to following Christ. After a full summer of learning what the expectations are for being a disciple of Christ, we were left with a choice: will we fully commit to it, or

will we coast along, letting someone else do the work? No one is forcing us to love, serve, and lead. Who will you choose to be? Throughout this series, we'll tackle four common roadblocks that prevent us from diving in fully, and offer four "BE"s that will answer those questions. Today, we'll look at a common struggle between all humans, and a God-given, built-in solution that is one of the most powerful foundational supports to our relationship with God, the faith community.

Setup Question: What's the most fun group you've been a part of? Maybe it was a childhood org like Scouts or 4H, camping and showing hogs? Perhaps you found a book club or martial arts studio later in life? Any Rotarians out there? What made it fun? Discuss!

SETUP

Last week, we started with a question that sits at the heart of many of the roadblocks to our faith... "Can I trust God?" If we trusted God more, put our lives fully in His hands, we would have less struggle with a lot of other issues that come up. We may *say* we trust God, but we don't often *live* like it. And so, we looked at a Scripture from Deuteronomy that reminded us that we have a *personal* God, One who has gone ahead of us to fight our battles. Which gave us our first "BE"...

BELIEVE

Believe that God will never fail nor forsake us. Believe that The Almighty Creator of the Universe is going ahead of you to personally fight for you and will never fail. **BElieve** that.

Today, we'll look at another question that makes fully following Christ difficult. See, even if you choose to believe that God is out there fighting battles for you, life can feel pretty lonely. Humans were made to be in community, to have others who fight these battles along side us. We were built with an innate human need for companionship. That can come in a lot of forms: biological families, friendships, romantic relationships, even organizations like those you mentioned in the last question. However, as good as those relationships can be, we also have a need for communities that foster spiritual connections. And when that desire isn't met, it can lead to a stumbling block in our faith. Thus, one of the most difficult aspects of life, when we struggle, is this question...

AM I DOING THIS ALONE?

When the desire to have others who understand our battles and fight alongside us isn't met, our faith, our confidence, our spirit struggles. Even if we **BElieve** God is out there fighting for us, that innate need for *human* spiritual companionship causes us to desire to have people to walk the journey with us. And so, one of the most disheartening hurdles to our faith, is if we think we are in this fight alone.

Question 1: Vulnerability time... do you feel alone in your journey? Is that by choice or circumstance? How has a faith community walked alongside you in the past?

SCRIPTURE

What's the answer here? If the question is, "am I in this fight alone?" God gave us a built-in answer. God knew, as much as *He* loves us, that we need human support, too. And so, God gave us the solution to that problem, the answer to that question...

THE CHURCH

Now, in The Connection, we are very careful how we use that word. We know many of you were hurt or burnt by the "church," the institution that let you down. But when we use that word, it applies to the capital-C Church, the body of Christ, the collection of followers of Jesus that represent the fullness and beauty of who God created us to BE. This is why we call The Connection a "faith community" instead of a "church." We're just one collection of many that makes up THE Church, that model we're striving to be. In fact, in today's Scripture from the book of Ephesians, Paul writes what this ideal should look like...

Read Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 16.

The Church is God's answer to our innate human need to have other people walk life's path with us. Are you alone in this? No, God gave you a community of faith to walk with you on your journey. Do we always get it right? Nope. Not even close. Do we

all struggle together, doing our best to live up to these expectations? Yup. And in that, we know we are not alone.

**Question 2: What stands out to you about this Scripture?
Had you been part of the faith community in Ephesus back
in Paul's time, how would you have felt reading it?
Encouraged? Challenged? What does it say to you today?**

REFLECTION

It's comforting to know we are not walking our journey of faith alone. However, in this scripture, Paul also has a few challenges for us. Being part of a community of faith that operates in this beautiful way isn't just about what we get out of it. Rather, he says, God makes the whole body fit together perfectly... but only if **"each part does its own special work."** (v16) This means you have a role to play. There's an old adage in pastor circles... 20% of the people to 80% of the work. That hasn't been true with The Connection, and it's great to see. From our inception, 80% of the people do all the work, (and that's because that other 20% is still in diapers.) But here's the thing... many of you are volunteering, which is awesome, but... are you doing the "special work" you were meant to play? You might be on the Worship Team singing once every few weeks, but are you supposed to be leading a Connect Group? You might be on our Liturgist squad, but should you be organization mission moments for our Engagement partners? Are you committing fully to the special work that God has asked you to do?

Question 3: Consider this phrase, “special work.” What is the special work within the body of Christ that God is asking you to do? Are you living that out? Are you fulfilling that call or is there a change you need to make?

So, what’s the result here? What happens when everyone does their special work? Paul doesn’t leave that to interpretation. He tells us, **“it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”** (v16.)

Pastor Mike said on Sunday at our 6th Anniversary Celebration, “our little faith community and the people in it are awesome! But, I want *more* people to experience this amazing thing we’ve built. I want more people to know the kind of love and affirmation we have here.” There is a world full of people who have given up on “Church,” and it is up to us to offer them a soft place to land to find a relationship with God and a Church again. Can our hearts break for the broken people in this community? How will we help others to know the love of God through Jesus Christ? If a healthy body of Christ grows, When we are healthy and full of loves, the Scripture says, when those things happen, the body *grows*. And it is up to us to make that happen. If we’re going to grow and see another 6 years, we have to take growth seriously. What we’ve got is great... but if we keep it to ourselves, we are not living the gospel. If we are going to be a church for people who gave up on church, you have to tell them we exist. It takes *you* sharing your faith with others. It takes *you* inviting people to worship or Connect

Group. It takes *you* bringing them with you, to make it stick. We are a relational church, so get to inviting.

And here's why...whether we think we're alone in the fight, if you're here, you've found the answer. You're part of an awesome faith community that fights with you. But there are people out there who have given up on church, maybe even given up on a relationship with Christ, who feel alone. And the Church is the answer to fighting alone... we are a place where you can...

BELONG

Our second "BE" is Belong. This has been our motto for a few years now, "where you **BElong**," and is our answer to this stumbling block of faith, "am I fighting alone?" The answer is "no, you are not alone... you have a place to BElong" and it's called The Connection.

Question 4: One aspect of that "special work" each of us is called to do, is to invite others into our faith community. Pause for a moment and ask God, "who am I called to invite to The Connection?" Quiet your heart and mind and listen for an answer. Then, make a commitment to that invitation this week.

CLOSING

Are you fighting alone? No. You have a community of faith that fights alongside you. But here's the challenge, there's a world

outside these doors that feels they are fighting life's battles alone. They need to hear of a God and a Church that will walk alongside them. Make it a point this week to celebrate the community of faith you enjoy, but also to invite others into this amazing group. Will you help others find that this could be a place for them to **BElong**?

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.