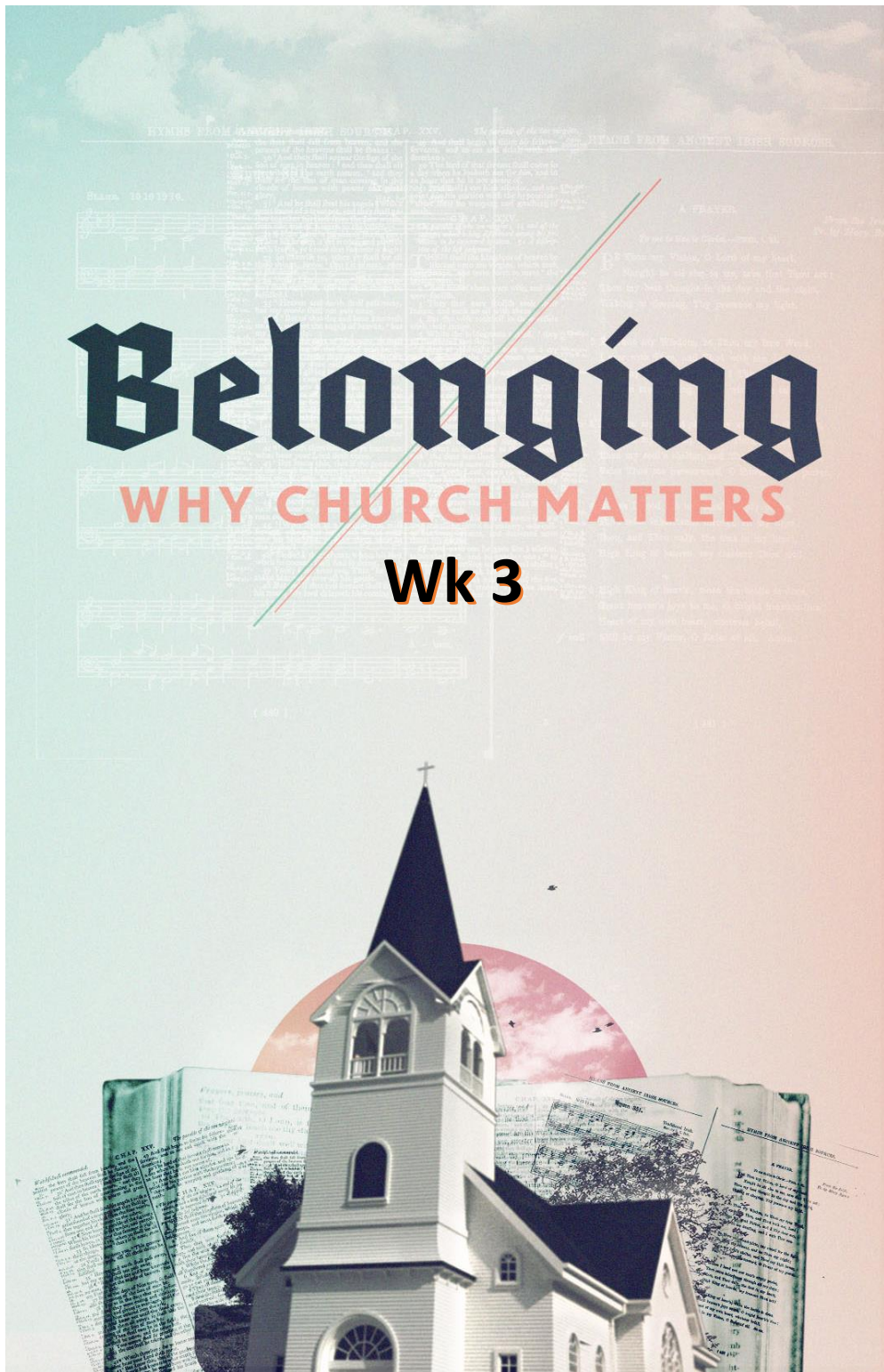


Belonging

WHY CHURCH MATTERS

Wk 3



MORE THAN A CROWD

A family to walk with

3

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 13:35 (ESV)

Intro

Check out the introduction video from Pastor Chase:

www.templebiblechurch.org/studyfall25/

Overview

In this session, we will explore how Jesus expects our relationships with other believers to look in contrast with the experience many people have and the values of the culture. We will begin with the words of Jesus on the night before his crucifixion and follow these themes through the New Testament.

Warming Up

- Has there ever been a time when your church family has shown you love or been there for you or your family beyond anything you expected?
- Do you have someone in your church family that you would feel comfortable calling at 2am if you had a problem?
- Was there anything in this week's sermon that you have questions about or thought was particularly interesting?

WK 3 Reading

For many people, attending a church service on a Sunday morning is not much different than going to a concert. A large crowd is funneled in and out of the venue after finally finding a parking place. They are all there because they wanted to hear the performer or they were talked into coming by someone else who did. Everyone is generally friendly towards each other, experiencing the bond of a shared fandom. And at the end, everyone goes back home to their separate lives, totally disconnected from the other concert goers with the exception of what perhaps populates their playlist. For those of you that would prefer to substitute *football game* for *concert*, feel free.

Unfortunately, this is the same experience a significant number of people who attend church services across the nation have each week. They are not involved beyond that Sunday morning gathering. They attend the worship service, maybe say hello to a few people they know from work or school, and then slip back out as part of a large mass of people. Sunday morning is the extent of their involvement with the church, not knowing many people and not being very well known.

Others may be more involved, attending a Bible study, a home group, or some other church activity during the week, but still having very limited connections for various reasons. They know more people but their relationships are shallow or one-dimensional. They are “church friends”. They would be very uncomfortable calling them for help at 2am or doing anything that would feel like an imposition by cultural standards. Most people’s relationships inside the church do not look much different than their relationships outside the church. In fact, for many, they have stronger relationships outside the church. Frequently we see that the church in practice does not live up to the church in promise.

The New Testament paints a very vivid picture of what the church, the community of the people of God, is to look like. While Jesus laid the foundation for this throughout his ministry, on the night before his crucifixion he emphasized two characteristics that would be its defining attributes.

First, we see Jesus talking to the disciples in the upper room in John 13, telling them he is giving them a new command. He says, “Love one another as I have loved

you”. Jesus has given them similar commands before. He has told them to love their neighbor as they love themselves (Matt 22:39). He has told them to love their enemies and pray for them (Matt 5:43-45). But this night, as he is talking about their relationships with one another inside the household of God, he raises the bar. They are to love the family of God not as they love themselves, but rather as he loves them. Jesus sacrificed for them. He would ultimately die for them. We would not describe the love of Jesus as “loving them like he loved himself”. He went beyond that. He put them ahead of his personal concerns and gave himself for them. That is the standard we now have for loving one another within the church.

The second characteristic comes a few chapters later in John 17 in what we refer to as the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus is praying for the disciples as he prepares to leave them. But in a surprising shift, he begins to pray for US! His prayer moves from the disciples that are with him to all those who would come to faith later, the church throughout the ages. And his prayer is that we would know and experience the same unity among one another that he experiences inside the Trinity.

So on his last night with the disciples, what he commanded and prayed for was that his people would love each other like he loved them and would be as united with each other as he was with the Father. This would be an amazing thing. It can be hard for us to even imagine what that might look like in practice, but fortunately, the Bible helps us there.

In Acts 2, we see a descriptive example of what these principles looked like lived out in the earliest days of the church. They were together daily in homes and the temple courts, learning about Jesus and sharing their lives together. And when anyone had a need, the rest of the community met that need, even going as far as to sell personal property to meet it. That made perfect sense to them in light of Jesus’ command. How can I profess to love someone yet leave them in need if I have the means to meet the need? How can I be content having plenty when a brother or sister is in want? They were truly trying to live out Jesus’ call to love one another.

Acts 2 is descriptive, not prescriptive. In other words, it is not a command to live exactly like they did, but rather it is a narrative description of how they lived out their attempt to obey Jesus at that unique moment in history. For us,

the challenge is to figure out what it looks like to live out the same principles that Jesus wants of his people today in our specific cultural context. It probably will not look exactly like it did for the early church. It also probably should not look much like our common modern church experience either.

This week as you work through the study, we will put special emphasis on exploring how we live out the radical love, care, and

support for one another that the New Testament assumes we will demonstrate to the world. For most of us, the expectations will be uncomfortable as they will cut across the individualistic ME thinking that the culture and our own selfishness have made so normal for us. But as we surrender to Jesus, his love overflows through us, and that creates a community where no one should feel like just another face in the crowd.

For Study & Discussion

- 1) Read the following passages describing what life in the church was like in the very earliest days following Pentecost.

Acts 2:42-47

Acts 4:32-37

- How did they spend their time?
- How do you see the love Jesus commanded them to have for one another demonstrated here?
- How is their experience similar to your experience with the church today? How is it different?
- Their experience at this time is very different from the norms of our cultural setting. Which of the things they did are appealing to you? Which things are not? Why?

- 2) In addition to the 15 times Jesus or one of the New Testament authors tells believers to “Love one another”, there are over 20 additional “one another” commands. These expand on what loving one another looks like. A sampling of those can be found below. Look up the following verses and note what is commanded and how that demonstrates love.

Romans 12:10

Romans 12:16

Galatians 5:13

Galatians 6:2

Ephesians 4:32

Ephesians 5:20-21

Colossians 3:12-13

1 Thessalonians 5:11

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Hebrews 10:24-25

- What factors tend to limit the degree to which we will do things above like forgive, serve, carry burdens, and submit to one another?
- A group of unbelieving friends can love each other deeply and even sacrificially. So how is the love the church is supposed to demonstrate different than that commonly found in the world?

For Deeper Reflection

- 1) What do you think of when you read Jesus's prayer for the unity of believers in John 17? What constitutes unity? Does it require complete agreement on all things and all preferences? What are acceptable things to break unity over?
- 2) Are there things from the "one another's" list you do for your biological family that you would not do to the same extent for your spiritual family? Are those distinctions valid?
- 3) What is keeping you from investing more time in the relationships in your church family? What concrete actions can you take this week to grow your relationships with both people in the church that you know and ones that you do not currently know well?