

BELONGING

JESUS | BAPTISM | MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP

Belonging to the Local Church

BELONGING is a sermon series happening throughout the 5 Sundays of January. It is about belonging to *Jesus* (responding to the gospel), belonging with Jesus in *baptism*, and belonging to Christ's body, *the church*, focusing on the centre of our faith and the individual and corporate outworking of it.

Opportunity to be baptized and to become a ministry partner (known as membership in some contexts) on Sunday, February 7th exists for those desiring to take that step of faith. The Baptism & Ministry Partnership Application form is available online and at our Welcome Centres.

OPENING COMMENT

From not seeing ministry partnership and membership in the Bible, to past hurts, to the belief that being a member of the universal church is enough, to an overarching skepticism when it comes to something being required, people have all kinds of reasons not to *belong* to a local church.

But what if there are *great* reasons, even *better* reasons, to belong to a local church? It is our conviction that there are more compelling cultural, personal, and practical reasons to belong to a local church than not to. More than anything, there are strong biblical reasons for it. It is a foundational element of every obedient Christian's life.

What stood out to you from Sunday's sermon?

REASONS TO BELONG TO A LOCAL CHURCH...

I: FOR THE GOOD OF BIBLICAL FAITHFULNESS

Epistle means letter or message. Nearly 40% of the New Testament is made up of epistles written by Apostles to churches. Take a few moments to read the introductions



of many of these letters: 1 Corinthians 1:1-2; Galatians 1:1-2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

1. What is significant about the fact that local churches were receiving these instructive and encouraging letters?

1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are referred to as *Pastoral Epistles*. Though written to individuals, they are instructions on how to lead the local congregations under their care. These letters are about teaching and leading (among other things) in the local church.

The early church is not all that unlike our churches today. Look at the church in Antioch for example, that sent out missionaries and received them back with a report and celebration about what the Lord had done through them.

Read Acts 13:2-3 and 14:26-27

2. From what you have read and what you know about these epistles, though the word *membership* does not exist in the texts, is there any doubt that these churches contained a community of people committed to Jesus and each other?

II: FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS IN THE CHURCH

Hebrews 10:24-25 *Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.*

1. Why does *the church gathered* matter so much?
2. That the writer needs to warn them not to copy the habit of some reveals that neglecting to gather with the church has always been an issue. What has motivated you not to attend regularly and commit deeply with your church family (past or present, if ever)? What seems to be the motivation of others you know?
3. What are some ways that you as an individual, a life group, and all of us as a church can nurture regular, consistent, committed gathering in large and small settings?
4. What would it look like if every Ministry Partner at Central came to church on Sunday and Life Group committed to stir up and encourage others? Commit to this practice *for the good of others in the church*.

III: FOR YOUR OWN GOOD

Galatians 6:1-2 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ²Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

1. Why is mutual accountability in the church a greater safeguard in your life than merely having an accountability partner or two?

2. The people who care for you most are willing to commit to you. Discuss how having a diverse number of mature brothers and sisters in Christ committed to your growth protects you and serves your faith in ways it wouldn't otherwise.

IV: FOR THE GOOD OF YOUR LEADERS

1 Peter 5:2-3 **Shepherd** the **flock** of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the **flock**.

1. In our age of loose commitments and consumerism, how are those commissioned to lead Central (Lead Team & Pastors) to understand who *the flock* are?
2. Read Acts 14:23 and 20:28. What we see is that elders knew who the flock was that they were overseers of and their responsibility to lovingly shepherd them was enormous. Ministry Partnership is our way of knowing who the flock are among us that are in this together, willing to be led, taught, disciplined if necessary, and walked with. Discuss.

V: FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH

Ephesians 3:8-10 ...this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known

1. See also 1 Peter 2:9-12 and John 13:35. Discuss how these three passages reveal how the unity of visible followers of Jesus compels a watching world.

Conclude your discussion by fielding questions about Ministry Partnership and practical steps. Then spend some time in prayer for each other, your church, and the mission we're on together for Jesus.

SHARE & PRAY

- Pray for the building of local expressions of the body of Christ, the Church. Pray for our growth in depth, commitment, and unity.
- Take some time to thank God for the church, pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit, pray for the protection of the unity of the church.
- Pray for gospel-advance in Chilliwack, Agassiz, and globally this year (Matt 9:37).
- Conclude by spending some time praying for one another, the growth in grace you want to experience, and the needs among you.

