



## Belonging

The Importance of not being Alone

## SCRIPTURE

❖ *Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an **apostle** and set apart for the **gospel of God** — the gospel he **promised** beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his **Son**,*

- *who, as to his **human nature**, was a descendant of David, and*
- *who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the **Son of God** by his **resurrection from the dead**: **Jesus Christ our Lord**.*  
(Rom 1:1-4 NIV)

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## SCRIPTURE

❖ *Through him and for his **name's sake**, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the **obedience that comes from faith**. (Rom 1:5 NIV)*

❖ *And **you also** are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.  
(Rom 1:6 NIV)*

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## CHRISTMAS GATHERINGS

- ❖ Who wants to be **alone** at Christmas?
- ❖ The simple answer is **no one**.
- ❖ Because of this, **people** all over the United States this month will be traveling far and wide to spend Christmas with family and friends.
- ❖ Regardless of whether the significance is religious or not, there is widespread agreement that "**Christmas isn't Christmas**" if you're all alone.



## CHRISTMAS GATHERINGS

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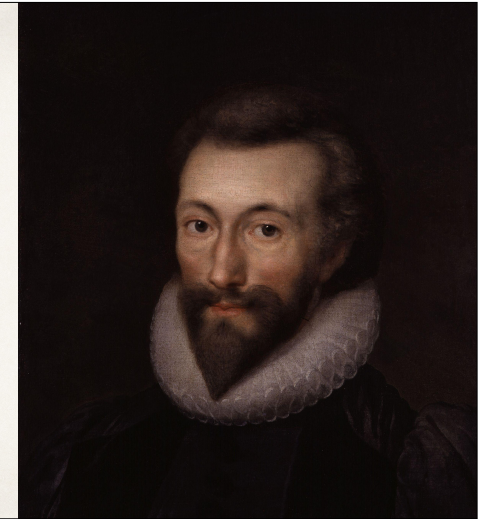
- ❖ Some might argue that these **gatherings** are simply nice traditions that were developed to make the holidays different from the rest of the year.
- ❖ But according to **social psychologists**, we all, to varying degrees, have a need to belong with others.
- ❖ Most of us already know this.
- ❖ We are **social beings**, and no matter how introverted we may be, we **need** and **want** to be around others.



## JOHN DONNE

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- ❖ In the seventeenth century, the great English poet and cleric **John Donne** wrote,
- ❖ *No man is an island,  
Entire of itself.  
Each is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main.*



## BILLY JOEL

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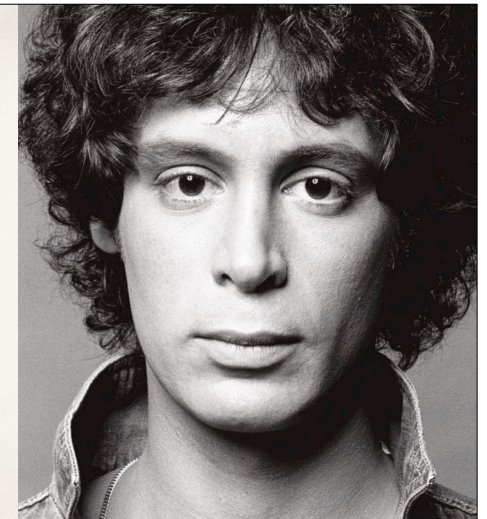
- ❖ Four hundred years later, **Billy Joel** wrote the lyrics to "I Don't Want to be Alone," saying,
- ❖ *I don't want to be alone anymore,  
I was checking you out.  
I was just making sure,  
No, I don't want to be alone anymore.*



## ERIC CARMAN

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- ❖ In his 1975 hit song "All By Myself," Eric Carman writes, ...
- ❖ *When I was young, I never needed anyone. Those days are gone  
Livin' alone, I think of all the friends I've known,  
But when I dial the telephone  
Nobody's home, All by myself.*
- ❖ *Don't want to be all by myself anymore  
All by myself.*



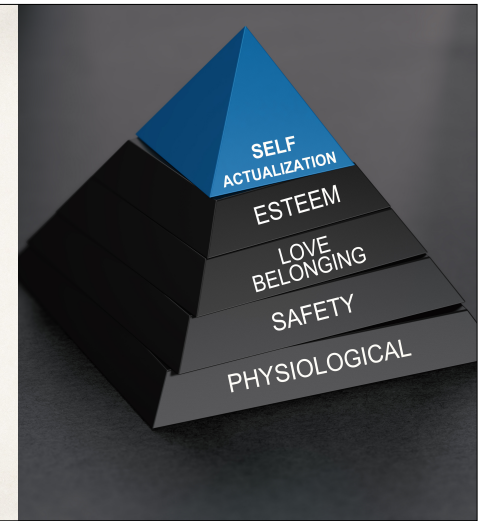
## TOGETHERNESS

- ❖ Donne, Joel, Carman, and countless other poets, songwriters, philosophers, psychologists, and theologians agree: As a species, humans do **not** like being alone.
- ❖ We prefer togetherness and belonging.
- ❖ This is why we have a need to give affection to others and receive it from them in return.
- ❖ In fact, it's one of the forces that urges us to connect with others.



## HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

- ❖ According to Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs," **belonging needs**, such as
  - friendship,
  - family, and
  - love ...
- ❖ Are the **first needs** to desire once our basic physiological and safety needs are met.
- ❖ In other words, we look for **fellowship** once our stomach is full.



## HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

- ❖ This is why in the garden, the Lord said, "It is not good for the *man* to be alone." (Gen 2:18 NIV)
- ❖ This is also why to be put "*outside the camp*" in the Old Testament and "*shunned*" in the New Testament was the Bible's preferred way to handle
  - **rebels** and
  - **those** who opposed community standards of conduct.



## THE VALUE OF BELONGING

- ❖ We **belong** to our spouses, families, friends, congregations, church groups, clubs, political parties, and so on.
- ❖ Some of these **associations** are by birth and kinship, but many are by **choice**.
- ❖ To whom and to what we belong both **affects** who we are and **reveal** something about who we are.



## BELONGINGNESS

- ❖ If I am in a **Small Group**, that says something about my interests, values, and willingness to participate in Bible Study and points to a **group of people with whom I identify**.
- ❖ But it also says **something** about what has drawn me to belong to this group in the first place.
- ❖ It may have been my **enjoyment** of spiritual things, but more likely, it was because someone in the Small Group **invited me to join**.



## INVITATION

- ❖ **Belonging** to Jesus is always by **invitation**, as Paul says in Romans, *not by works, but by him who calls (invites)*. (Rom 9:12 NIV)
- ❖ This is also why the **Scripture** says it *depends not on man's desire or effort but on God's mercy*. (Rom 9:16 NIV)
- ❖ When Paul talks about those "*called to belong*," the emphasis should not be just on "*belong*" but on "*called to belong*."
- ❖ Paul understood **God's call** as a **powerful word of invitation** that offered a **new life**, a word that also made **our response** to the invitation possible.



## BELONGING & RESPONSIBILITY

- ❖ **Belonging**, though, brings with it responsibilities.
- ❖ Our **family** expects us to show up at the family Christmas gathering, and if we don't, we'll have to answer to Grandma.
- ❖ When we "**belong**," there's a responsibility to ...
  - respect each other's roles,
  - uphold the group's values, and
  - get along with each other for the **good of the whole**.
- ❖ This is why **love is an obligation** if there's to be any sense of **community** among us.

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## COVENANT

- ❖ A biblical word for this **sense of community** is the word **covenant**, which is applied not only to
  - to **relationships between people** but also
  - to the **connection between God and people**.
- ❖ **Covenant** is a "*belonging*" word.
- ❖ We are **called to love God** and **love our neighbor** as we **love ourselves**.
- ❖ We may not think of those things as **obligations**, but they are, for there can be no full community or covenant with God without them.



## BENEFITS OF BELONGING

- ❖ Belonging also brings significant benefits.
- ❖ We receive care from those to whom we belong.
- ❖ In our times of pain or need, friends, relatives, and people from church are usually great sources of care and comfort.
- ❖ In times of joy, those with whom we fellowship rejoice with us.
- ❖ This is why the Scripture says, *If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.* (1 Cor 12:26 NIV)



## BENEFITS OF BELONGING

- ❖ Eric Speir, the author of the devotional guide, Stubborn Faith, mentions several advantages of belonging.
  - Provides us with needed accountability.
  - Helps us to get where we want to go faster.
  - Gives us an outside or objective view.
  - Helps us to see our blind spots in life.
  - A place where others aren't afraid to ask us hard questions.



## SIN DESTROYS BELONGING

- ❖ Wanting to belong is a constant theme in all of our relationships.
- ❖ It is a God-given desire, yet, like all of God's good gifts, it can be broken and distorted by sin.
- ❖ When a relationship is one-way and is only focused on self or what one can get out of the relationship, it will soon be destroyed.



## SIN DESTROYS BELONGING

- ❖ The same can be said about our relationship with God.
- ❖ If our sole reason for serving God is
  - to get and not to give back by ministering to the body of Christ,
  - we will damage our relationship with each other and with God.
- ❖ Healthy relationships are ones where each party gives and receives and where no one takes advantage of the other.

## ADVENT OF THE CHRIST

- ❖ The reason **Jesus** was born was to die for our sins so that we have **fellowship** with God.
- ❖ He came to that which was his **own**, but his own did not receive him. (John 1:11 NIV)
- ❖ Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become **children of God**. (John 1:12 NIV)



## CONCLUSION

- ❖ You did not choose me, but I **chose** (invited) you and appointed you to go and **bear fruit** — fruit that will last. Then the **Father will give you whatever you ask in my name**. (John 15:16 NIV)
- ❖ In other words, Jesus invites us into fellowship with God and gives us the **responsibility of belonging by bearing good fruit**.
- ❖ If we are faithful, the **benefit** we'll have is answered prayer.



## CONCLUSION

- ❖ So then, if we faithfully participate in the **body of Christ** today, there is no good thing that God will withhold from us. (Psalm 84:11)
- ❖ Let us, therefore,
  - **rejoice in our election**,
  - **fulfill** our responsibilities, and
  - **expect** the benefits of belonging to God to flow into our lives.

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## FINAL WORD

- ❖ As it is written, *But you are a **chosen people**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* (1 Pet 2:9 NIV)
- ❖ And if we **belong to God** and take our responsibilities seriously, we can also expect Him to be faithful.
- ❖ As God has promised, *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* (Heb. 13:5 NIV)
- ❖ For we belong to Him, and in Him, we live and have life.

