

## **Sept 10 - God's Hospitality – Part 1**

1. What does belonging mean to you?

*This is simply a self-reflection question to get people talking about their experience of belonging. Try to encourage people to keep their answer's short, hear from everyone, and then press into the meat of the study.*

2. Is there a place of belonging? Why or why not? What would be one step we could take as a community to deepen our shared sense of belonging? What would be one step you could take as an individual to deepen your sense of belonging?

*Again I would encourage you not necessarily to linger here but it would be important to hear from everyone. If there are reflections / ideas that you think the leadership of the church would benefit from I would love to hear from you.*  
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*If there is a place to press in with your group I would encourage you to linger on the second part of the question. This is "our" community and it is important that we personally take ownership of being the change we want to see.*

**Read Genesis 1:1-5; 26-28; 31, Proverbs 8:27-31, and John 1:1-3, 14, 18**

3. The writer of Genesis uses a plural name for God (Elohim). In the beginning the God of relationship, the God of community creates. Reflecting on these passages what can we say about this community and the relationship that exists between them?

*Linking these passages together we can say that the first few verses of Genesis lay the foundation for our belief that God exists as a trinity – Father, Son (Word), and Spirit.*

*The Word, Jesus, was at the bosom of the Father meaning that love was primary between them.*

*One of the members of the Trinity speaks in the proverbs passage of the delight and enjoyment that exists within God.*

*Tim Keller in his book **The Reason for God** says that the inner life of the trinity is characterized by mutual self-giving love as each member of the trinity revolves around the other two, orbits around the others, pouring love, delight, adoration into the other. The early church had a word for this – perichoresis – within it is our word choreography. They were picturing a beautiful dance of love, adoration, enjoyment and delight within the relationship that is at the very center of the universe.*

4. "Let US create humankind in OUR image". What are the implications of our being created in the image of this community?

*Relationships are primary – they are meant to be central in our lives. If we put anything else at the center, be it money, career, beauty, comfort, sex, power – anything else we will be dashed upon the rocks of ultimate reality. We were made by relationship for relationship and it is in relationship that we will flourish.*

*What kind of relationship? The relationship that exists within God, that of mutual self-giving love. To have our relationships defined by a posture. No no no not my needs – your needs. There will be mutual flourishing if we were to say that in every relationship we find ourselves in. There is an otherworldly beauty to it which is absolutely glorious. If you have had a taste of such a thing even momentarily, you know, AH AH this is what I was made for!!*

Genesis 3 tells the tragic story of humanities rejection of the relationship out of which we were made. Our turning aside from a life of mutual self-giving love to desiring for life to revolve around us. For that is what sin is – human nature deeply curved in on itself.

### **Read Matthew 3:13-17**

5. Here we have another clear picture of Elohim at work. This is considered the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Reflecting on this scene what can we say is the work God is doing in Jesus?

*As this scene reflects the scene of the beginning of creation we are being told that God is about a recreation in Jesus. God is desiring to make all things new. In Jesus' death and resurrection Elohim centers all of his being on us where everything that keeps us from him is dealt with so that we might be drawn into the dance of mutual self-giving love that exists within God.*

We are created in the image of Elohim, the God of community. There are many things that image means, but one of the primary things it means is reflection. We were made to reflect the goodness character and love of God out into the world. As a mirror only reflects what it is oriented toward, our lives will not reflect the character and goodness of God unless we are oriented toward the God of community in worship.

6. Worship is defined by James Torrence as "participating through the Spirit in the Father's relationship with the Son". Discuss.

*I thought it might be helpful to share once more the story I relayed in the sermon as I believe it was a picture God gave me to share with others. I pray it might help shape your discussion.*

*Earlier this year I attended a conference in London England called the Alpha Collective – each of our sessions began with an extended time of worship – As a*

*pastor I am not often in a setting where in worship I am not thinking about what needs to happen next – my job is facilitating worship - but there I was able to reflect more deeply than usual on what I was participating in. During one particular time of worship I was brought to a remembrance of the truth that in worship we are invited into the life of the trinity – to participate through the spirit in the sons relationship with the father - and as I began to prayerfully reflect on that – as I worshipped – I got a picture – a picture I can only say was from God*

*In the picture there were two figures, one above the other. On the top was the Father, on the bottom the Son. The Son was praising the Father, glorifying him, extoling his goodness and character. That praise was being carried to the Father by way of the Spirit. The Father was pouring out his love, affection, and affirmation upon the Son. That love and affirmation was being carried to the Son by way of the Spirit.*

*I next sensed that I was being invited in. That I was to take my place with Jesus. For by faith we are united to Jesus in everything that he does. As I did so I sensed - this is what worship was meant to be. In worship we are meant to join Jesus in offering praise to His Father. To praise him for his goodness and love and majesty and power. In worship we are also meant to join Jesus in receiving the Father's love and affirmation and affection. To hear the father speak over us – "you are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased" – in worship we enter into this dance of mutual self-giving love.*

7. While we need human community to flourish we must enter into that community from a place of belonging. How does knowing who we are in Jesus shape our relationships with others?

*I reprint here an unedited portion of the sermon that I think will serve you in reflecting as a group on this question.*

*Most of us enter into relationship desirous to have our needs met – do you know me – love me – accept me – approve of me? In worship we orient our lives toward the one who meets our needs, whose verdict over us in Jesus is – you are loved – delighted in – accepted – known – and so we can then enter into relationship free to love – free to know – free to welcome – free to extend belonging - for we have heard the voice of Elohim speak love over us – we have beheld the glory of who we are in Him.*

*Now I wouldn't want to leave anyone with the impression that as long as I have a solid relationship with God in Jesus that you won't need the love, acceptance, understanding of others – for chapter 2 of Genesis – that we will look at next week – reveals that even in paradise – even where there is no sin – even where God's verdict over all has been – it is very good – even there – there is a "it is not good" – it is not good for humanity to be alone – we don't just need God - we need human community to flourish – however we must enter into that human community from a place of belonging – a place of being welcomed into the relationship out of*

*which we were created and for which we were created – we must enter into human community with our lives oriented in worship toward the trinity – that we like a mirror we would reflect his love, goodness, and hospitality into whatever relationships we find ourselves.*