

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Standalone Sermons
TITLE: BELONG. BELIEVE. BECOME.
SCRIPTURE: Luke 15:1-32
DATE: August 19, 2018
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The Gospel story is a love story. When you open the Bible and begin to read its narrative one of the first things that is strikingly clear is that God desires a relationship with those whom He has made. Genesis 1 and 2 are laced with poetic language of companionship and express our connection with God as being created in His image. When that connection was broken due to our act of sin the Bible begins to string together a collection of writings that all have a common theme: God is pursuing us for the purpose of making us right with Him again.

Luke 15 begins with Jesus, who we believe is God manifest with flesh and bone, surrounding himself with what society would call "bad people". In fact, it wasn't just that Jesus was intentionally trying to collect this lot of people, the Scriptures actually say that it was they who were drawing near to him. There was something so magnetic and so inviting about God's presence that people flocked to it. They knew they were wanted. They knew they were loved. Of course, those in power at the time felt threatened and confused by this and so the religious elite of the day, the Pharisees and scribes, began to grumble and complain about who Jesus surrounded himself with. In essence, they were disqualifying him from being truly righteous because he intentionally spent time with those who weren't.

Instead of defending himself or launching into some complex explanation of His redemptive mission, Jesus tells three simple stories - all of which have common themes of something being lost and that same thing being loved.

In this picture of God we see a manifestation of His love - it is inclusive, inviting, and immeasurable. The entire chapter begins with Jesus creating spaces for sinners to belong. He welcomes them. He eats with them. What Jesus did (and what we honestly have a hard time doing so often) is creating a reality where people truly belonged even before they believed in Him. What the Pharisees tried to create was essentially a works-based system of righteousness where you had to behave in all the right ways, believe all the right things, and then you could belong. But no one could live that way - not even the Pharisees lived up to their own standards. What Jesus did was welcome people first - allowed them to belong first, sometimes long before they believed and in so doing created a reality where people's knowledge that they were loved and wanted hopefully led them to a desire to love Him in return.

Today is a Sunday where we are focusing on the Next Gen ministry. We are reminded that God is for the next generation and He may be inviting some of you to serve in that area. The culture we try to create in Next Gen is exactly that which Jesus created when He walked the earth. Belong. Believe. Become.

We desire students and children to know they are created in the image of a loving God and that they belong here.

We hope that through belonging they would come to believe in Jesus - the source of life and salvation.

Over time and the process of discipleship, we help them become like Him through the power of the Spirit.

We believe that God may be asking some of you to say "yes" to the next generation. Would you simply ask God is that is something He is leading you into? And if He says, "yes" would you step out in faith to help us create the culture of Belong, Believe, Become?

Big Idea

The love of God is inclusive, inviting, and immeasurable.

Jesus created a culture of belonging so that people might come to believe in him and therefore become like him.

For Discussion —

1. Jesus was accused of hanging out with "bad" people. Why do you think his response was to share the three stories of something being lost and loved?
2. How does Jesus surrounding himself with sinners give us insight into what God has done throughout all of Scripture in His pursuit of us?
3. Why do you think it's so important for people to know they belong before they feel safe to believe?
4. Both sons had everything they could have possibly wanted from the Father and yet both somehow missed it. Come up with a few examples of how you think this happens in people's hearts today.
5. Have you ever found yourself in the shoes of either brother? Running from God like the younger or bitter with God for his love towards sinners like the older? Would you be willing to share a little bit from that experience?
6. In your relationship with God, what have you discovered to be more satisfying than what the world offers?
7. How do you need to apply these stories to your heart? Do you need to come home? Do you need to join in on the celebration? Is God calling you to be the one who goes after those who are lost? Who do you need to help belong?