

DAY 1 (week starting 11th June 2018)**Read - 1 John 4:7-21**

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. v7

There is a growing individualism and isolation in modern society. We are becoming increasingly isolated and anonymous. We pass by hundreds of people every day and don't know who they are or anything about them. We don't greet them. We don't know their names or their stories. Sometimes we don't even know our neighbours or the people we work with. The only community some people know is just their immediate family, and some don't even have that. Some of the results of this isolation are a deep loneliness for many people, a lack of social responsibility, crime and inhuman behaviour. Some young people gravitate to gangs because of a deep longing to belong somewhere.

This need to belong is answered when we realize that God loves us and we belong to him. We are each his special child and he loves us and we are precious to him. Jesus calls us back into community. The Christian faith cuts across the isolation of the modern world. When we belong to Jesus we automatically belong to a community, the church, the family of God. Everyone needs to belong. God made us for relationships. He did not want us to live alone, he made us to interact with others. God's very nature is love, and we are created in his image. We are only fulfilled and find our true being when we learn to love and care about others.

How are your relationships at the moment? With God and with others? Are there bridges you need to build, or mend?

Thank you Father God that I am your beloved and precious child

DAY 2**Read - Romans 8:15-17 & 1 John 3:1-3**

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received a spirit of adoption (into the family of God). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father!" Rom 8:15

If you ever find yourself feeling sorry for yourself, and think that nobody loves you, just go back and read these two passages of Scripture. They remind us that through God's amazing grace we have been adopted into God's family and we are loved. God is our Father. We have brothers and sisters in Christ. We belong.

Sadly some people who have come to faith in Christ never involve themselves in the church community. They attend worship but never take time to get to know anyone. This is not the way Jesus intended it to be. He wants us all to experience the joy of belonging to a caring community that is rooted in the love of God. To discover that, even if the world has rejected us, or our own family has hurt us, here we are loved and accepted.

Community is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and as Paul tells us, *"The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"*. God is our heavenly Father and the Spirit enables us to call him "Abba", a Hebrew word that literally means "Daddy". We are invited into a personal relationship with God the Father. As John says, *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God."* 1 Jn 3:1

Brother, sister let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant too.

DAY 3**Read - Psalm 133 & Genesis 1:26-27**

How pleasant it is when brothers (and sisters) live together in unity. Ps 133:1

Have you ever thought that the reason belonging and community are so important to God is that God himself is a community. Think about it. God is **One**, yet God is also Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity lives in fellowship. When God created the world he said, "Let **us** make men and women in **our** image, in **our** likeness" (Gen 1:26). God dwells in a wonderful fellowship in heaven, both within himself, and with other heavenly beings like the angels, and those who have died and gone to be with him.

Community is not spoken about much in the Old Testament because it was taken for granted that it was part of the Covenant that God had made with Israel – he was their God and they were his people. God mostly dealt with them as a community. And this sense of community is still very strong among Jewish people, even today. Psalm 133 beautifully expresses how pleased God is when there is unity amongst his people.

Community and unity are just as important to God today. They are also important for our own growth and well-being in the Christian faith. There are no "Lone Ranger" Christians.

How rooted are you in the community of the church. Are you part of a Home Group or some other meaningful fellowship?

We are the family of God, joined by the Spirit above; working together with Christ: growing and building in love. Bind us together Lord, with cords that cannot be broken.

DAY 4

Read - John 10:1-14 & Psalm 23

I am the Good Shepherd. Jn 10:14

One of the most beautiful pictures of community and belonging in scripture is of the shepherd and the sheep. In Bible times they were a part of daily life. People saw them often.

As Christ-followers Jesus is our shepherd and we are his flock. Here are some of the blessings of belonging to his flock:

1. **We are fed, we find pasture, and we grow.** In the fellowship of the church we are fed spiritually, and nourished through the preaching and the teaching we receive. Fellowship is important for us to become mature and Christ-like.
2. **We have fellowship.** Being part of the flock is God's answer to our isolation and loneliness. We belong.
3. **There is caring and sharing.** When we, or others are in need, or going through tough times, we can reach out and help one another.
4. **We have protection.** Jesus speaks of wolves and false shepherds. There are many evil and destructive forces in life and we are safer in the sheepfold. And when we get lost, the shepherd will not rest until he finds us and brings us home.
5. **There is unity and harmony.** The presence of the shepherd keeps the flock together.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul. Amen

DAY 5

Read - 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. v27

Paul describes the community of faith as being like a human body. The parts of the body are very different, with different functions, but each one is needed if the body is to be healthy and function as it should. No part of the body can say to another part, "I don't need you", or, "You don't need me". For example the stomach cannot say to the mouth, "I can get along without you!". They both depend on each other. Without both the body would starve and food would not get digested.

In the Body of Christ we don't just belong, we are an integral and essential part of it. Everyone has a gift and it is important for us to discover our gift and use it. When each one uses their gift the church grows strongly as it should and can be powerfully used by God. When we serve in line with our gift we usually find ourselves energized and inspired. But when we serve in an area that is not our gift we often find ourselves drained and tired.

Paul also says that when one part of the body suffers, the rest of the body suffers with that part. Illness, hurt or damage affects the well-being of the whole body. So it is with the Body of Christ. An injury to one is an injury to all, We feel one another's pain, and we must care for one another.

Furthermore, we reach out to the pain of the world where we can, in the hope that those we touch will be brought back to Christ.

There is only one God, there is only one King. There is only one Body, and that is why we sing; Bind us together Lord, with cords that cannot be broken.

DAY 6

Read – John 15:1-12

I am the Vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. v5

There are many lovely pictures of community and belonging in the New Testament. They describe what the church and the community of faith should look like.

The Vine and the branches. We grow and bear fruit when we stay connected to Jesus, drawing life from him and "abiding", or "remaining" in him. When we submit to God's pruning and shaping we bear fruit for the Kingdom (Jn 15:1-12)

We are God's Temple. Each of us is a brick or some other part of the structure that holds it together. It is a Temple where God is worshipped and Christ is the corner-stone (1 Pet 2:4-7)

We are the new Israel. Through the New Covenant established by Jesus and sealed with his blood, we are the new people of God. We are called to worship and serve him, and to take the good news out into the world. We are a "kingdom of priests" (the priesthood of all believers): a priest is one who has special access to God and stands as a bridge to connect people with God. (Heb 9:11-14 & 1 Pet 2:9-10).

The ship of salvation. Just as Noah's Arks saved the animals and those who were faithful to God, so the church of God (**we** are the church) saves people by the amazing grace of God from the destruction that is coming as a result of their sin. (Gen 6:11-22)

Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen