

### Belonging

I was in band in high school. The band was the Concert Band, which meant (by default) that I was also in the Marching Band and Pep Band. By the middle of my freshman year, I had made it into the Jazz Band as well. Then, at the beginning of my junior year, I became the Drum Major. Finally, as a senior, I was appointed Student Conductor. There's more, but you get the point.

The point of all this is to relate the benefit that came to me through my band involvement. There were a lot of places at my high school where I felt very uncomfortable (e.g. the gym or the locker room, the math department, sitting in the Vice Principal's office, etc.). But despite these places of discomfort, the Band Room was a different story. In the Band Room, I felt a sense of belonging. And the people in the band room, even those who were jocks, Einsteins, or stoners, all contributed to that "belonging." I belonged in the Band Room, and I belonged with the band people.

I've come to understand that just about everyone feels a deep need to belong somewhere. Even the word "belong" supports this. The related word "long" has as one of its meanings "yearn." We yearn for a place where we can fit in. The ancient root of the word "long" even connotes a sense of dependence.

That's where Paul is really taking us in the Book of Romans: he assures all believers that we belong to God, and carefully explains that we are completely dependent on God for the gift of eternal life.

Eternity with God: that's where we belong.

#### Monday – Through Him, For Him

1. Please read Romans 1:1-7. From whom did Paul receive the calling to write this letter to the Roman Christians?
2. What do you think it means to do something through Jesus and for the sake of Jesus' name?

**Digging Deeper:** Imagine for a moment that you are Paul. What practical things would you do to ensure that you were living your life through Jesus and for the sake of his name? What is one thing you can do today to live in a manner that is more mindful of Christ and his glory?

#### Tuesday – Grace and Apostleship

*Through him we received both the generous gift of his life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into obedient trust in Jesus. **Romans 1:5 (The Message)***

1. Look closely at Romans 1:5 in your Bible. Then read the same verse from The Message translation (above). What did Paul receive from Jesus?

**Text Insight:** An apostle is a person sent with a message. It's related to the word "post" as in Post Office.

2. What was the purpose of Paul's apostleship? What role did God's grace play in equipping him in carrying out that purpose?
3. Are you acting in the obedience that comes from faith, according to verse 5? Ask God for the grace to do so today.

#### Wednesday – Where You Belong

*"Don't try to hold God's hand; let Him hold yours. Let Him do the holding and you do the trusting."*

H William Webb-Peploe

1. Please read Romans 1:6. What does Paul assure the Roman believers?
2. In John 10:27-30, Jesus clearly explains the great benefits of belonging to him. What does this passage say about those who belong to Christ?

**Making it Personal:** Take a closer look at John 10:27-30. Do you find any comfort in his words? How could you use this passage when speaking to someone who has doubts about their relationship with God?

#### Thursday – Loved and Called

*"Whether you understand it or not, God loves you, is present in you, lives in you, dwells in you, calls you, saves you and offers you an understanding and compassion which are like nothing you have ever found in book or heard in a sermon."*

Thomas Merton, The Hidden Ground of Love

1. The first part of Romans 1:7 identifies those to whom Paul is writing this letter. What does he say of the Roman believers?
2. How do you think being loved by God goes along with being called to be a saint?
3. A saint is someone who is set apart for God, just like a sanctuary is a place set apart for special purposes. Look again at Romans 1:7, as well as John 14:26 and John 15:4. Where would you expect to find the resources it takes to live for God?

#### Friday – One Gift after Another

*"As I look back on my own pilgrimage, marked by wanderings, detours, and dead ends, I see now that what pulled me along was my search for grace. I rejected the church for a time because I found so little grace there. I returned because I found grace nowhere else."* Philip Yancey, What's So Amazing About Grace?

1. What two gifts does Paul deliver to the Roman believers in the second part of Romans 1:7? From whom?
2. Please read Philippians 4:4-7. What sort of things does Paul say will promote peace? What do you think he means by a peace that is beyond understanding?
3. Now look at John 1:14. Along with truth, what else did Jesus possess? What does it mean that Christ has extended grace to us?

**Making it personal:** Are you doing the things that Paul identifies as leading to peace? Do you live your life in the knowledge that you already possess God's grace? If so, join with Paul in saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"