



# Sermon Growth Guide

**August 22, 2021**

**Belong - Lonely**

**John 4:5-13**

**Key Verse:** John 4:10

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

**Big Idea:** Jesus invites you to belong.

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## Foundations

Today we begin a new series, ***Belong***. What a timely series it is, as we all continue emerging in various ways and timing from the isolation of this past year's pandemic.

Tim says, “We were not made to be alone. Solitude can be a blessing but alone is no good.” **Think of a time in your life when you've felt isolated and lonely. How would you describe that time, and what contributed to it?**

**What factors in our lives and in our world today would you say push against our need to belong, depriving us of this experience that's so important to us?**

Tim states, “The start of learning to belong is recognizing where we are lonely.” **What are moments in your life that can fuel a sense of loneliness? If you don't tend to feel lonely, why do you think that's the case?**

Pray that God moves you daily toward meaningful engagement with others, and that He will lead you to others who may be feeling lonely and isolated, in need of an encouraging word or touch of God's love through you.

## Understanding God's Word

We're told in 4:6 that “Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well.” Think about that statement: God, in our form, was tired! **Though we're months from the Advent story of the nativity, how can this glimpse encourage you about God's love in sacrificially taking upon Himself our form?**

Why do you think the Samaritan woman was startled by Jesus' request in 4:9? **What can Jesus' actions model for us in our interaction with others who may be different from us?**

## Applying God's Word

This sermon series reminds us of our need to belong in community with others. **As you process these words with others, share how that group has helped you in your efforts to belong. And reflect upon how God can use you to enhance others' experience of belonging within this community.**

## Witnessing God's Word

Tim says, “Where are the lines that leave us alone? Can you jump one?” **Where can you jump a relationally separating line this week, as Jesus did with this Samaritan woman?**

I want to talk to you today about being lonely. What is this feeling? What do we do about it? As we start a series called **Belong**, the first step is admitting, acknowledging, there is something called **Lonely**. Some people like being alone for awhile. One of the chief parenting techniques is the “Go to your room!” command. Go to your room! Kids, ever heard that? We have four kids, which sometimes meant a pretty rambunctious environment, and we have extroverts and introverts. Tell an extrovert to “Go to your room,” and you might as well have threatened to throw them to the sharks. Others, though, we’ve said, “Now go to your room and shut that door!” They say, “Fantastic! Sounds great. Call me when dinner’s ready.” But we were not made to be alone. Solitude can be a blessing but alone is no good. Alone is no good. You can be alone in a crowded room too. No good. We were not made for alone. We were made for belonging. We all have a longing to **Belong**.

Before there was a COVID

pandemic there was a loneliness epidemic. The UK appointed a Minister for Loneliness in 2018. More people feel more alone than ever before. The Surgeon General of the U. S. wrote an article in the *Harvard Business Review* in 2017 citing a “loneliness epidemic” and claimed that rates of loneliness had doubled since the 1980s. In one survey asking people how many friends they have they feel they can confide in, the amount of confidants has decreased from 2.9 in 1985 to 2.0 in 2004, and it’s worse today. Cigna has gotten involved because loneliness impacts life expectancy. Their research finds that the younger you are, the lonelier you are. Generationally, we are losing connection. Social isolation for ages 18-22 is 20 percent higher than those over 72. Cigna says it can make you sick, it shortens your life. Loneliness, they say, has the same effect on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is even more dangerous, statistically, than obesity. Which leads to the natural conclusion, it’s better to eat cake at church

than eat kale alone. Something we all suspected was true; somewhere inside you already knew that.

Nothing hurts quite like loneliness. We are in a loneliness crisis in our age. And that’s before COVID. God has something else for us. We need to be together, we need to gather, we need to belong. Our desire for independence is strong, but our need to be together is stronger. Babies cry until they are held. Kids love groups and always want to know a best friend. Solitary confinement is the most horrific punishment, and kids do cry when you send them to their rooms. When we get sick, when we get hurt, when we are near to death, nobody wants to be alone. Let’s learn to Belong. Jesus is inviting you to **Belong**.

The Samaritan Woman came to draw water at the middle of the day. We learn more about her when we read the whole story. We will read the whole story, but today we just see this first moment. She came to the well at noon. What





was she? She was alone. She was lonely. Jesus showed up. “Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon” (John 4:4-6). This is a real place. Everybody knows where this well is. It’s still there. If you read much about it, you’ll learn that Jacob dug a well in a region where there were some springs and streams fairly nearby. Do you know why he dug it? Because he couldn’t get along with his neighbors and they couldn’t get along with him. Just tuck that away in the back of your mind. Jesus went to that well, Jacob’s isolation well, almost 2000 years later. It was noon.

“When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)” (John 4:7-8). Why was she there at noon? The Middle East is not a cool place,

temperature-wise. Fetching water was a daily task and constant need. No running water meant carting it from the well every day. For most cultures, and certainly for this one, it was slaves and women and children who got that job. It wasn’t an honor! So when they went, they tended to go in groups and make the most of it. It could be a little break from the burdens of the day, a time to connect, share stories, a time to socialize. Not for this woman. She came alone. As we learn more about her it gets easy to speculate, but for some reason or another hanging out with others at the well was not her thing. She went alone, at noon, when she could all but guarantee she would not bump into anybody. Alone. Lonely.

Jesus turns up and orders a drink. It’s not strange to ask for water in the middle of a hot day. But, as we will see, what is strange is that this man would ask this woman for help. Why? “The Samaritan woman said to him, ‘You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?’

(For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)” (John 4:9). Or, to put it another way, Jews and Samaritans don’t share cups. Just a quick history. Jews and Samaritans descend from the same people, but when the Babylonians came and captured Jerusalem about 500 years before this event, they took all the leadership class and most of the city residents away into exile. The Jews who were left behind intermixed with the locals. They kept some of what they learned as God’s people but mixed it up with local religions. Eventually they set up their own Temple on Mt. Gerizim. When the Jews returned from exile, they burned that Temple down. They rejected the Samaritans. They were considered religiously impure, morally impure, racially impure. They didn’t share cups.

How many lines do we draw to make ourselves feel superior to others? The distinctions we think make us better than others only separate us from one another. I want to tell you this story. Once a friend came to me and told me that when



he was a young man, he was homosexual. He had been abused as a child. When he left home, he lived for four years in the city, living a promiscuous gay lifestyle. Now he was married and he and his wife were expecting a child, but he felt he had to unburden himself. When he was finished, we prayed together and I gave him a big hug. Weeks later he said to me, "That time I shared my story with you, do you remember that?" "Um, yeah!" "That was really healing for me," he said. "Not just talking about it, but the hug you gave me after. Most men I've told about that seemed afraid to touch me after I tell them." Where are the lines that leave us feeling alone? Can you jump one? Jews and Samaritans don't share cups. Jesus did.

Jesus elevates the conversation to another plane: "Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water'" (John 4:10). We'll get back to this. For your Bible notes, just know that the phrase "living

water" is not so airy-spiritual as you think it might be! That just meant "running water" most times people said it. But Jesus does mean something else. We'll come back to that.

Now, Jesus needed her to get the water for Him. Why? Well, His disciples had gone off to Walmart. They didn't have Costco back then, or they would have been stocked up. So they went to Walmart. Jesus was helpless. He had no bucket. The woman points this out, rather snarkily actually. "'Sir,' the woman said, 'you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?'" (John 4:11-12). Ever heard someone say "sir" and they don't mean "sir?" Sir, she says, you have nothing. We know who she's talking to. She doesn't know who she's talking to. Imagine saying to Jesus, who could make water come out of your ears, who could make storm clouds gather up and drop 12 inches of water

in a cup, imagine saying to the Son of God, "you have nothing."

But he had nothing to draw with. And she's right, the well is deep. It's 100 feet deep. Jesus was helpless. This is how Jesus comes to this woman. Helpless. Isn't that how Jesus came to earth? Jesus, the Son of God, came as a helpless baby, leaving Himself in our hands. "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7 ESV). O, what a Savior! Have this mind among you. You know, need is an occasion for relationship. How much of our rising loneliness is tied to our rising economic independence? Materially wealthy and socially poor, relationally lonely, friendship poverty.

Last week I told a story about a family who needed a shovel. God did a lot of great





stuff in that lack of shovel. That wouldn't be me. I have three shovels, and if I needed another one, I would sooner run down to Home Depot and spend the \$25 than walk across the street and ask my neighbor Doug if I can borrow his. Why is that? This may feel like a rabbit trail, but it's not. One of the reasons we are lonely is that we don't need anything. We don't need each other. Borrowing and lending; giving and receiving; sharing and reciprocating; this is the stuff of relationship. We don't need, and if we did, we sure wouldn't ever tell our neighbor. I really want you to sit with this for a minute. Jesus came without a bucket. Jesus showed up to a well without a bucket. Jesus, who is God, Lord of All, Owner of the Cattle on a Thousand Hills, chose to show up that day at that well in front of that woman without a bucket. Are you willing to show up without a bucket with your neighbor, or with someone on the other side of the aisle, on the other side of the issue, on the other side of the tracks, on the other side of the racial distinction, or

the gender distinction, or the class distinction, or whatever? Show up without a bucket. Let need start relationship. Just a thought.

Well, Jesus did elevate the conversation back in verse 10. He used the word God. "Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water'" (John 4:10). What is the gift of God? What is the living water? Who is it she is speaking with? Whatever the gift of God is, it's big enough to break down walls. It's big enough to include a Jewish Rabbi man and a Samaritan, socially-isolated woman. See, I think she was lonely. She wasn't just alone; she was lonely. And the things she was doing to manage her pain, to navigate her isolation—separating herself from others socially, going to the well alone, sharp, sarcastic and superior words—these coping mechanisms, Jesus knew, were never going to satisfy. "Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again'"

(John 4:13). She needed to recognize, first of all, she was lonely.

I want to leave it there. I know, what a horrible pastor. But the start of learning to belong is recognizing where we are lonely. Aren't we lonely? You may not be at the clinical level, but I'm sure you feel it. I do. And I'm sure you sense it in the water out there. Maybe you are at the clinical level. Reach out. Get help. Reach out to us and let us connect you with help. The coping mechanisms only dull the pain. Everyone who drinks like that will get thirsty again. Jesus has a better plan for you. I leave you with this. One of the most successful ad campaigns right now is VRBO. What does it promise? "Your Together Awaits." Your together awaits. Jesus invites you to **Belong**.

