



# Sermon Growth Guide

**September 5, 2021**

**Belong - Open to God**

**John 4:20-26**

**Key Verse:** John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks."

**Big Idea:** In Worship, we belong to God and one another.

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## Foundations

John Ortberg wrote, "The yearning to attach and connect, to love and be loved, is the fiercest longing of the soul. Our need for community with people and the God who made us is to the human spirit what food and air and water are to the human body."

For the third week we're looking deeply into the interaction between Jesus and the woman at the well. During their conversation, the woman asks about worship. Where is the right place to worship? The Jews said Jerusalem, but the Samaritans said Mt Gerizim.

But Jesus turns all this on its head by saying, "a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks," (John 4:23).

Pastor John writes, "Jesus is saying that when we worship God, all of who we are becomes aligned with all of who He is, under the Holy Spirit's influence. Our worship is also grounded in the truth of what Christ has done for us, as well as the truth of who we are."

Pray that God gives you understanding of true worship on this side of the cross. Pray that you come to understand in a rich way how true worship ties directly into belonging, belonging to God and belonging to one another.

## Understanding God's Word

Host a discussion on the meaning of verse 24: "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

In verse 26, Jesus responds by saying, "I am he," (*ego eimi*). Who is Jesus affirming that He is? Why is this important?

## Applying God's Word

In Worship, we belong to God and one another. Pastor John notes that in worship we are known, we are one, and we are equal. But we must press into this belonging.

How can you take steps to deepen your experience of belonging here among the First Pres worshipping community?

## Witnessing God's Word

Who is the "woman at the well" in your midst? Who is near you, but uninterested in belonging to God and His family? Who is hiding because they do not know the hope and freedom of the gospel? Close your time this week praying for these individuals together. Pray that God will give you open doors to "meet them by the well" and Share Good News.

**ALONE IS NO GOOD. JESUS INVITES YOU TO BELONG.**

As we continue our **Belong** sermon series, we return for a third week to Jesus' interaction with a woman who didn't fit in. Tim previously preached about **Alone** and **Risk Being Known**; today's theme is **Open to God**, as we elevate an important and often overlooked area of belonging. Since we're entering this story midway, here's a brief summary of the conversation (John 4:7-18) so far that leads into our passage:

**Jesus:** Would you give me a drink?

**Woman:** Why would a Jewish man ask a Samaritan woman for a drink?

**Jesus:** I can give you living water.

**Woman:** There's nothing like that around here.

**Jesus:** This water won't satisfy; what I give results in deep, lasting life.

**Woman:** I'd like some of that.

**Jesus:** Let's get more personal—where is your husband?

**Woman:** I don't have one.

**Jesus:** You've experienced a number of broken relationships.

**Woman:** You must be a prophet to know this. Let's talk about something else.

During my mid-20s, I moved to another state to attend

seminary full-time. I left behind a community of family and friends that was a source of meaningful relationships, and arrived on campus the beginning of July for summer classes, not knowing anyone. My sense of not belonging was heightened as I watched other students enjoy relationships formed during the previous school year. Ironically, a popular TV show had a theme song at that time: "You want to go where everybody knows your name." I went from belonging in meaningful ways, where many knew my name, to being known by no one. It took 2½ months when other new students arrived for the fall until I finally began to feel I belonged in that community.

I can't think of a more appropriate sermon series than this one. Every one of us longs deep within to be known not only by name, but for who we really are. This desire to belong and engage with others is how we were created by God. John Ortberg wrote, "The yearning to attach and connect, to love and be loved, is the fiercest longing of the soul. Our need for community with people and the God who made us is to the

human spirit what food and air and water are to the human body."

It's true, isn't it? And that's why this past year's social isolation felt so oppressive during the pandemic. We had to keep our distance from the very relationships we've created for; our sense of belonging was challenged. We were isolated, quarantined, and masked—and we had to stay 6 feet away from each other; no hugs and no shaking hands. We couldn't travel to visit our loved ones, our children couldn't be with peers at school, and for awhile we couldn't even worship in person!

Some of these restrictions still linger or are returning; for the most part, though, we're not where we were a year ago. But what happens when social restrictions are eased, and we find ourselves still longing for more relationally than we're experiencing? That's the reason for this series. At first glance, Jesus' comments about worship seem to have little to say about our need to belong. Yet His words remind us of the tremendous relational impact in what we're doing together this





very moment.

This unnamed woman was probably trying to get the spotlight off herself and deflect any more personal questions. So, she re-directed the conversation by raising a historical argument between Jews and Samaritans: “Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 14:20). Both groups agreed God commanded that a place be established where they could worship Him, but they disagreed on the location. The Jews placed worship in Jerusalem, while the Samaritans selected Mt Gerizim, where Jesus and the woman were having this conversation.

Jesus responded in three ways. First, He declared that worship locations would soon no longer be important: “‘Woman,’ Jesus replied, ‘believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem’” (John 4:21). After Jesus drew all to Himself on the cross, worship became tied to Him, not to a place.

Jesus went on to reinforce that

the Jews were God’s means of saving the world: “You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). Though it may sound like Jesus was taking sides against this woman, He was simply reiterating God’s plan to use the Jews.

Jesus then concluded by asserting the importance of how God’s people are to worship: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Jesus twice mentions worshiping in Spirit and in truth—and repetition is always a sign that something’s important to Him. Jesus is saying that when we worship God, all of who we are becomes aligned with all of who He is, under the Holy Spirit’s influence. Our worship is also grounded in the truth of what Christ has done for us, as well as the truth of who we are.

Sometimes, Jesus’ audience didn’t seem to have a clue what

He was saying. This woman’s final response may have been her way of admitting, “I don’t understand what you’re telling me”: “The woman said, ‘I know that Messiah’ (called Christ) ‘is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us’” (John 4:25). Her fallback was that the Messiah would eventually sort these things out when he arrived.

Jesus answered that she was looking at Him: “Then Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you—I am he’” (John 4:26). Jesus literally responded with God’s name, “I am.” What’s so beautiful about this moment is that Jesus revealed Himself in this way for the first time in John’s Gospel to a woman . . . who was a Samaritan . . . who didn’t belong.

The word for “worship” or “worshiper” occurs 13 times in John’s Gospel, 10 of which are found in this passage. Right about now, you may be wondering: what’s this conversation have to do with belonging? I’m glad you asked! This act of worship that we’re all part of fuels a sense of belonging in three ways:



First, In worship, we are known. Our desire to belong may prompt us to selectively reveal ourselves to others. Tim noted last week that we tend to put our best foot forward and keep less attractive qualities under the surface. However, as journalist Sidney Harris observed, the human personality is not an apple to be polished, but a banana that needs to be peeled. When others only know a portion of who we really are, our experience of belonging can feel thin.

When we worship God in Spirit and truth, we present to Him all of who we are. Thomas Walker notes, “Each week in worship we encounter . . . God who knows everything about us, whose nature is defined by love, and who loves us even knowing all that we have done.” The truth we bring before God is that we don’t have our act together; His truth is that He loves us anyway. You belong to God—and through what we do here together, you belong to this worshiping community.

The Samaritan woman was stunned to learn that Jesus knew about all her broken

relationships. This act of worship provides a setting each week where we are similarly fully known. So, here’s our first question: Can God’s accepting knowledge encourage us to reveal a little more to others of who we really are? Perhaps our fears, uncertainties, or even failures, or where we’re struggling and could use some encouragement. The more you trust me with who you really are, the more I can do the same, and our experience of belonging is deepened.

Second, In worship, we are one. Just as this woman approached Jesus alone, we enter this space individually. But worship transforms us from a room of separate people to one body as we share this experience together. This is the biggest difference between worshipping God elsewhere on our own and doing so here with others. Both honor the Lord, but the second draws us into a larger community, where we can experience a sense of belonging.

When the Denver Broncos have home games this fall, thousands will enter the stadium individually. But when a big

play occurs—and hopefully one will—they’ll cheer as one. For 3-plus hours they’ll have a shared experience together. We get to do this here every week, as our worship of God opens us up not only to Him but to each other. We each belong within this larger community, as our worship together unites us.

Greek philosopher Epicurus wrote, “Of all the means to ensure happiness throughout the whole life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friends.” But friends don’t just happen—and belonging doesn’t just happen. So, here’s our second question: Would you take steps to deepen your experience of belonging within this worship community? If you’re not part of a group outside worship, I encourage you to join a Rooted group this week. If you are connected, why not introduce yourself to someone you’re worshipping with but don’t yet know.

Finally, In worship, we are equal. All of our differences feel increasingly pronounced nowadays, don’t they? There are political differences, racial differences, socio-economic





differences, and generational differences. We feel humanity is being pulled apart as some of these differences become more and more pronounced. Friends, that's what makes worship such a radical act of belonging: it pushes against the culture around us. Jews and Samaritans could worship together because of Jesus, and the early church understood this in a way that shocked society. Slave and free, men and women, powerful and outcast all gathered to worship together as equals.

We each approach this worship experience from many different walks of life, but never forget: we all experience this time together as equals at the foot of the cross. Our common identity as God's loved creation in need of His grace transcends any ways we're different. My final question is to ask, would you take a moment to look around at those worshiping around you? Can we look beyond our differences to see God's image in each other, and understand how much we belong together?

I close with a story of what it looks like to belong within a worshiping community. When

Tom Tewell pastored Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, he noticed a church member named Jim seated in the sanctuary one Christmas Eve before the service. Jim was a recovering alcoholic who was six months sober, and this was his first Christmas since his family had left him because of his alcoholism. As Jim watched a family of four in front of him, laughing and hugging each other on Christmas Eve, Jim was crushed, and all he could think was that he had to have a drink.

As Jim came down the center aisle, he ran into Tewell, who asked where he was going. When Jim said he was going to get a drink, his pastor's alarms went off. He told Jim, "You can't do this. Is your sponsor somewhere around?" Jim answered, "It's Christmas Eve, and my sponsor is in Minnesota. There's nobody who can help me. I just came to church to try to find some hope, and I ended up sitting behind this family. If I had my life together, I'd be here with my wife and kids too."

Tom took Jim to the pastor's robing room to talk to a couple other pastors, and wondered

what to do. It was time for the service to begin, and he was needed in the sanctuary. Tom prayed for God's wisdom before going out to greet the congregation with the usual announcements. Then a thought came to him, and he said, "I have one final announcement. If anyone here tonight is a friend of Bill Wilson (Bill Wilson was the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, and members of AA often refer to themselves as friends of Bill W.)—and if you are, you'll know it—would you please step out of the sanctuary for a moment and meet me in the robing room?"

From all over the sanctuary, women, men, and college students rose and made their way out. On a night when Tewell preached about God becoming flesh, this was lived out among this congregation. That's God's desire for us, as we worship in Spirit and in truth.

Each time we worship here together, we are known, we are one, we are equal—and we belong.

