The Building Blocks of Faith Toolkit

The Need to Belong

For our faith to grow, our deep need for belonging must be met. We need God's Spirit and God's people to help us know that we belong to God and that we belong in God's family, the church.

Belonging to God

The belonging found in Christ fills a deep need in all people to be loved, accepted, and appreciated. Belonging to God is at the heart of what we long for as Christians.

The writers of the Heidelberg Catechism acknowledged this need way back in 1563 with their first question: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" The answer begins, "That I am not my own but **belong**—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." [1]

Q&A 1 has become dear to many believers because it addresses our need to belong. A man who served as an elder in a church even has a tattoo of Q&A 1 on his arm. One day as he visited with an elderly member of his church living with Alzheimer's disease, the woman touched his arm as he began to recite the question and answer and—much to his surprise—started saying it along with him. Even though speech was difficult due to her disease, those words of belonging remained in her heart and on her lips.

Belonging in God's Family

When we think about the development of children, we know that one of the first things they need is to feel safe and loved. Abraham Maslov, for example, places belonging as one of the basics in his Hierarchy of Needs. [2] Psychologist Erik Erikson's first stage of psychosocial development is "trust vs. mistrust," [3] a statement of feeling safe and of belonging.

All people are born with a need to be part of a group. According to the Commission for Children at Risk, people are hardwired for connections to other people.[4] These connections can be as close as spouses, parents, children, and dear friends. They can also be as broad as friendships with colleagues, coworkers, and our church community.

Christians, and those who are seeking Christ, need to know not only that we belong to God but also that we belong to God's family, the church. People of all ages feel this need.

As one church was making ministry plans, they gathered input from members. Lisa, a woman in her late 60s, mentioned her concern that the church's main focus seemed to be on children and teens. She asked, "When are we going to start doing things for the old people?" Some people were taken aback by this rather direct question, but Lisa was expressing a desire to feel that she and others her age belonged and were valued by their congregation.

Another church underwent an extensive renovation. The spaces were beautiful, but the kids somehow felt that they were all for adults. A few boys tried to make part of the church building "theirs" again by bringing flashlights to church so that after worship they could explore the basement in the dark. They needed to know that they still belonged somewhere in the church building.

Concerned about the safety issues of running around in the dark, the church staff set some games on the new coffee tables in the fellowship hall. The kids stopped trying to explore the basement alone and began playing checkers and building towers with Jenga blocks in the midst of their church family. With these small changes, the new space had become their space.

It is not enough to be told that we belong. We need to *feel* it.

This article has been adapted by Laura Keeley from "Building Blocks of Faith" by Laura Keeley and Robert Keeley, first published in Lifelong Faith *(Issue 8.1, Fall 2014, pp. 2-12).*

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[1] The Heidelberg Catechism can be found at crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism.

[2] Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs can be found in a number of resources, including Anita Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology, 12th ed.* (Boston: Pearson, 2013), pp. 434-35.

[3] Erikson's theory can also be found on page 88 in Woolfolk's *Educational Psychology*.

[4] *Commission for Children at Risk, Hardwired to Connect: the New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003)