

Forty Days of Purpose Devotional

Day 17 "I am called to belong, not just believe."

We hear a lot about "calling", but what does it really mean? When you "call" someone, what do you do? You pick up the telephone, dial a number, and hear "Hello" on the other end. You say: "I am CALLING because" What you have done is perform an action designed to get someone's attention, in order to communicate something. There are many possible purposes for "calling", including issuing a warning, offering an invitation or just trying to make someone happy. So if God "calls" us in order to communicate that we need to "belong" to His church, we might want to know what His purpose is. It is, in fact, all of the above. He wants to warn us of the danger of not belonging. He wants to invite us to belong, in order that we might receive the blessings that come from belonging. Why would He do that? He wants us to be happy in a way that nothing but belonging can provide.

"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'Today', so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first." (Heb 3:12-14 [NIV])

What we see from this Scripture is that sin is deceitful and can lead a person to turn away from the living God, thereby acquiring a sinful, unbelieving heart. Ongoing ("till the end") mutual encouragement, however, can block the work of sin's deceit, leading to sharing in Christ. But can't a person simply encourage himself and accomplish the same thing? NO!

"We all stumble in many ways." (James 3:2) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jer 17:9 [NKJV])

Whatever we have just done, or whatever has just happened, Satan will whisper to us that God's love and forgiveness does not extend to that. He wants us to abandon the truth and think rather that either we are not good enough for God, or that He is not good enough for us – or both. We can easily be tricked into thinking such thoughts (reread the quotation from Jeremiah, remembering that this is God's Word). Only hearing the truth from others can lead us back to the truth. But sharing such thoughts, and receiving such encouragement, requires *trust*, and trust comes in established, committed relationships – from families to which you *belong*.

- God wants us to belong so that we can be blessed (see Ps 133).
- The isolated individual is extremely susceptible to sin's prime weapon, deceit.
- God establishes the truth in struggling believers through loving encouragement, for by this His body reveals His character. The isolated person may not even know they are sick until it is too late.

Rate your experiences in church in regard to how "trustworthy" your leaders and peers have been (on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being "not at all trustworthy" and 10 being "completely trustworthy"). Do you hide your true thoughts and feelings, especially in church? Honestly confess your mistrust in Christ's body, and ask the Lord to establish you in a body of true believers who seek to love and encourage one another. Before you decide that this means you must change churches (again), remember that "true believers" are not perfect people, and meditate on your own trustworthiness. Seek to become the kind of Christian you would like to have as a friend, and the Lord will send such friends to you.
