



THE WAY Sermon Study Guide

Week 11: The Way In - Belong

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The Christian faith is deeply personal, but it was never meant to be lived in isolation. From the earliest days of the church, followers of Jesus gathered together to learn, pray, eat, serve and grow. In a world that values independence and convenience, Scripture calls believers back to proximity, shared life and mutual transformation.

This week we reflect honestly on our relationship with Christian community—its joys, challenges and its role in shaping our discipleship.

Read Acts 2:42-47

In the early days of the church, believers devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, prayer and shared meals. They met together regularly—both in large gatherings and in homes. They shared their possessions, supported those in need, and lived with glad and sincere hearts. And as a result, God added to their number daily.

It's tempting to dismiss this passage as idealistic or outdated. After all, that was 2,000 years ago. Life today is faster, more complex, and far more individualistic. And yet, despite video calls, messaging apps, social media and more ways to stay connected online than ever before, people remain deeply lonely. Screens can keep us connected, but they rarely make us feel *close*. There is no substitute for being in the same room face to face.

The early church understood something that remains true today: proximity matters. Shared presence creates depth. Community shapes hearts in ways that convenience never can. And following Christ was never meant to be a solo pursuit.



1. Why do you think independence is so appealing in our culture today? Looking at your schedule this week, is there one digital interaction you could replace with a face-to-face meeting, such as a coffee or a shared meal, to foster deeper connection?
2. Where do you see the tension between personal faith and shared faith in your own life?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

These verses offer both encouragement and warning: believers are urged to spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, but encouraging one another all the more.

There are times when people drift from community. Sometimes it happens intentionally—taking a break, feeling hurt, or deciding to do things differently for a season. Other times it happens quietly and gradually. But stepping away from community into isolation creates vulnerability. Doubts can grow louder. Discouragement can deepen. And subtle lies can take hold: *You don't belong. They don't understand you. You're better off on your own.*

Scripture names Satan as the father of lies (John 8:44) and isolation is often the environment where those lies thrive. We don't need to be afraid, but we do need to pay attention and recognise God's good design for spiritual community, which provides protection, perspective and truth.

1. What tends to pull you away from Christian community—busyness, disappointment, fear, or comfort?
2. Which "whisper" or lie about your place in the church community has felt most believable lately, and how does the truth of God's Word specifically answer that lie?

Read Matthew 18:19-20 and Proverbs 27:5-6 & 17

When the early believers gathered in the temple courts, they came together for teaching and worship—much like modern church services. But they didn't stop there. They also gathered in homes, sharing meals, conversation, prayer and everyday life. Both settings mattered then, and both still matter now. Large gatherings inspire, align and remind people that they are part of something bigger. Smaller gatherings create space for honesty, listening, accountability and care.



Small groups, in particular, have a unique capacity to surround people in seasons of joy and celebration, as well as seasons of doubt, grief and hardship. People laugh, cry, debate, disagree and grow. Small groups often become places where loneliness loses its grip and spiritual family is formed.

But community isn't only about encouragement and comfort. At times, it also involves challenge. Proverbs reminds us about the importance of accountability and loving speaking into each other's lives. This kind of sharpening isn't harsh or critical. It's rooted in love and mutual commitment. Sometimes it's a gentle question. Other times it's a timely reminder. Occasionally, it's a loving challenge that stings a little in the moment, but ultimately leads to clarity and growth. We need this more than we realise. It's easy to overlook blind spots or justify unhelpful habits, but a community that genuinely wants the best for one another is a wonderful thing!

1. How has community encouraged or sustained you during a difficult season?
2. How can accountability be offered in a way that feels safe and life-giving?

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and John 13:35

God's goal isn't to create impressive individuals, but a transformed people. Theologian C.S. Lewis observed that private religion often becomes distorted. When faith is detached from community, it can slowly be reshaped into something more comfortable, more individualistic, and less Christ-like. But community acts as a corrective, grounding believers in shared truth and love.

After all, the Church is the Body of Christ—made up of many parts, each dependent on the others. No part is unnecessary. No one thrives alone.

Unity, however, does not mean uniformity. God doesn't erase individuality. Instead, he weaves diverse people together, shaping them into something greater than the sum of their parts. And this shared life does something powerful: it becomes a witness. Jesus said that people would recognise his disciples by their love for one another. When believers commit to deep, healthy community, it becomes visible—and compelling—to the world around them.

1. How do you think authentic Christian community appears to those outside the church? In what ways could deeper unity strengthen our witness?
2. How might your perspective on church change if you viewed your attendance not just as a personal spiritual boost, but as a vital contribution to the unity that helps others see Jesus?



Closing Reflection

The call to community isn't about trying harder or doing more. It's an invitation to participate in what God has already designed. For those who have been hurt or disappointed in the past, this invitation may feel risky. Healing takes time, and grace is needed. But even there, God can do new work—replacing reluctance with hope, and isolation with belonging.

Where might God be inviting your group to step more fully into community? You may like to consider one or two of the following together:

- A simple step towards deeper connection (shared meals, prayer partners, intentional check-ins)
- A commitment to consistency in gathering
- An openness to encouragement or accountability
- An act of generosity or service done together

Suggested Closing Prayer

Lord God, Thank you that you have designed us for relationship with you and with one another. Help us to resist isolation and choose connection, even when it feels vulnerable. Teach us to encourage one another, to speak truth in love, and to walk together with humility and grace. Heal places where community has been difficult or painful, and form us into a people who reflect your love. May our shared life draw others towards you as we follow Jesus together. Amen.