

## Called to Belong - Dan Gibson

### *(Lego Batman Video)*

Great films, even great children's films, focus on a central issue that is a pressure point for humanity. A critical theme that although perhaps it oft-goes unspoken or unrecognized by people, it is an issue that draws us in; emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and leaves us with an ability to empathize with this central theme, whether it be channeled through the main character or whatever else.

In Lego Batman we are drawn in by Lego Bruce Wayne's deeply-seeded grief of losing his family, feeling that his orphaned state meant that he would never experience the joy of belonging again to a family. Even though this movie is a comedy aimed at children and nostalgic millennials who miss their Lego, it hits on the craving for belonging that all humans experience throughout their lives- a craving that cannot be satisfied in temporal things, but can only be truly satisfied in right relationship- as a child of God, and as a part of his family, the church.

Let's pray.

The real-stuff of human existence is funny eh? I'm not talking about fancy dinner parties or the height of intellectual achievement. I am talking about the genuine struggles that we all face, whether we are kids, teenagers, young people, old people, business people, tradespeople, unemployed people, black, white, yellow, brown, ... There are real cravings that affect us no matter what our station is.

I love being able to try and understand and identify this central craving in our lives, a part of the reason I love working with young people is because they are much less subtle about hiding this desire to belong. It's really not that complicated to see, I can even show you some pictures of teenagers from the not too distant past, and we can identify how they illustrate the craving to belong. Ya, ya, ya, laugh it up. This is me and my four closest friends in 2006. We started a band and together- we were living it up as 17-year olds with very limited fame. It is easy to see, even as simple and innocent as it is, to see how I along with my friends were finding belonging in this photo.

First of all it is clear to see how we found our identity as punk-musicians (and no that is not an oxymoron!), secondly you see how we identify and belong by the instruments that we are holding (or laying in front of), you can also look at our clothing and see we all spent (or made our parents spend) a stupid amount of money to look the part, wearing clothes from fancy skateboarding brands and band t-shirts. In those days, to be a teenager and a fan of punk music meant to look the part, wear skater shoes and t-shirts, and although I have rode a skateboard exactly twice in my life, I felt the need to look the part.

Although the times have changed, teens still feel this pressure to fit in. And believe me, although us adults pretend that we don't seek out identity and belonging in life, it is such an act that we put on. We are all driven to seek out identity and belong to something; it could be as simple as belonging to a family or rearing your own, identifying with your social class, with your occupation- all things that seem to satisfy the urge to belong but really fall short of true identity.

For some people this becomes an obsession and can manifest itself in complete and utter evil; as belonging to something means that they discriminate or hate someone else in order to fit in. As we

look at the horrifying and shameful cases of racism and xenophobia that are all across the news today all over the world; and have hit close to home, especially in the United States in Charlottesville and beyond. We all have the craving to belong, and whether we try and satisfy it by becoming vigilantes like Lego Batman, or by creating a punk rock band with your friends, we can never satisfy it on our own.

Thankfully as scripture says, it is not our responsibility to fill that void. As we discussed with Pastor Steve last Sunday, God created us for the purpose of making us His children, to share His glory. In the book of Ephesians, if you will join with me in your Bibles or on the screen, Ephesians 1:4-5.

#### ***Ephesians 1:4-5 New International Version (NIV)***

**4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he[a] predestined us for adoption to sonship[b] through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

Being adopted as God's sons and daughters means that we are no longer orphans, we are part of a very real and very intimate family of God's other sons and daughters. This process was never by chance. Scripture tells us that God predestined us for adoption through Jesus' sacrifice and defeat of sin and death at the cross. We can spend time debating the exact meaning of predestination, of whether God has already decided who receives salvation or not- but for the case of discussion it is important to know that God's family has not developed through random chance; God has created His household because he created and desires us to live with Him in community. The hunger for belonging that we have experienced for our whole lives is meant to be eternally satisfied by finding our identity as God's very own children, and as part of God's family, which is as the Bible clearly states, is the church. In fact, I can read this to you, it literally talks about it 1 Timothy 3:14 and 15:

#### ***1 Timothy 3:14-15 New Living Translation (NLT)***

**14** I am writing these things to you now, even though I hope to be with you soon, **15** so that if I am delayed, you will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God. This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth.

The word the church is not at all referring to a structure made of brick and concrete, it's not a place to go to! It's also not purely an intellectual notion or unfathomable spiritual concept. When we read the term church it refers to the actual body of believers. Sometimes we call this the family of God- and it is an essential part of the Christian life as outlined by Paul and others in the New Testament.

Professor Joseph Hellerman wrote about the absolutely essential part that community plays in God's plan for our lives with this quote:

"The idea of salvation cannot be reduced to a personal relationship with Jesus. God's plan is much more encompassing. God intends for salvation to be a community-creating event."

— Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community*

If there is only one thing that I pray you receive this morning, it is that being a follower of Jesus is not meant to be a lonely road. Of course there will be times that you feel lonely, there are moments that we all feel like no one truly understands us... but when you look at the Gospel, instruction is given to the CHURCH, which we have identified is constituted by the followers of Jesus. Pastor Steve shared with us God's first purpose for us in creation, which is to BELONG to and BE LOVED by our God- our second purpose is to BELONG to and BE LOVED by each other. We are called to live out the identities of the church, three of which I will outline this morning.

### We are: the Family

The problem is when we often think of the church we simplify it in our minds to being something much less than God intended it to be. We are called to gather and we are called to worship together, and in doing so we act as the family of God.

In preparing for this sermon I was able to listen to Pastor Rick Warren speak on this topic and his description of the church as a family was very enlightening for me. He described the role of the church as to help us as individuals to learn and be reminded of our true identity as children of God.

We are all born into a physical family. For some of us that family was a very good family. I was blessed to be born into a family that loved me, cared for me, and encouraged me to explore and experience what a relationship with God really means. Throughout my life sometimes that has been a challenge because I've felt like the bar is set very high, so high that I could not even pretend to reach it.

For some of us our biological family brings us feelings of pain, abandonment and distrust. That is the reality for many people that are part of the church, or people that are not yet part of God's family.

When Rick Warren spoke on the church being the family of God, he made sure that all understood that our biological family is always secondary because it is in reality a channel to get us into the family that God purposed us for, so it doesn't matter if we come from an amazing family or one that was almost non-existent. The family of God lasts forever, it was designed for eternity and we all are welcomed equally into it.

### **Ephesians 2:19-20**

**19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,<sup>[d]</sup> but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

We are no longer foreigners to the family, we have no need to be outsiders as your entrance fee was paid by Jesus' sacrifice. We are made CITIZENS and members of the household through Jesus' blood, along with everyone else who proclaims Jesus as Lord. Being a member of this household gives us the ability to call each other brother and sister, because our identity is now found as part of the family of God.

But what exactly does that mean? We have all had very different experiences in how a family operates, but we can follow the example of the early church in how we see the family of God work together.

The family of God does not discriminate, it does not hold others in special favour, and it looks to embody the values that Jesus exemplified in His ministry.

It might seem like semantic, but calling each other by our correct name can be the beginning of that process. Especially when we look at a gathering of the church like at BBC, it can be overwhelming... and frankly we can forget that we are all members of the same family.

At this point, I would like to spend 20 seconds demonstrating exactly what I mean, could I get you all to stand up? We will call this Family Break! Please walk over and embrace someone you don't know that well, and say to them " We are family".

When I think of the term Family, it so aptly describes my experience as a young person here at BBC. I've had a very diverse group of friends growing up, friends from school, from playing sports- but none of them have stuck and been so deeply engrained in my life- becoming my family, as those who I made here at BBC.

I spent last weekend at the wedding of a very good friend of mine, a guy who I have shared so much of my life with. Him and his now-wife requested that I serve as the unofficial officiant of their wedding, which was such an honour. He was a part of my D-team, the discipleship team that I was part of as a teenager in our youth group. That group was so close, we met weekly at the Mee's house (bless your souls) and when time came to go to University, many of us wound up together in Waterloo at Wilfrid Laurier. We laughed together, stayed up to late together, did really stupid things together, and supported each other in our faith journeys as we became more independent from our parents. We also spent time mourning our losses; broken relationships, losing parents and grandparents, failing and succeeding in our studies.

Life can hit you hard when you are 18 and lose someone. I remember October 2007- driving back from Waterloo to Brampton in 47 minutes because my friend's parent was soon to die from cancer- it was the most difficult car ride I've ever made in my life.

But we did it together. When we faced difficult times, our brothers gathered around us and shared in our grief, and we prayed together. It wasn't always glorious and it wasn't always easy as we struggled through faith and belief together, in a secular university. But I do believe that God worked a miracle through our commitment to each other. We were and still are family. This month is 10 years since we went from being friends to brothers and I urge you, if you do not have this kind of family with your Christian brothers and sisters, you need to invest in those people around you.

I stand here sharing with you today not because I have had a seamless transition to a Christian young adult and pastor, but because the church provided me with a family that I could not abandon. We as followers find our identity in Christ- we are reminded and assured in that identity by our place in the household of God.

However it's not just about a brotherhood. As the church we all need to fill different roles in the family. We NEED spiritual Aunts and Uncles, Grandparents, Nieces and Nephews. I had the privilege of having youth leaders that loved me and built into my life, adults who cared for me besides my parents- that made a huge difference. We need to continue that heritage to ensure that our next wave of young people are disciplined as well.

### We are: the Temple of God

If we refer back to Ephesians 2 we see that Paul does not finish with the Church as a family, but almost seems like he mixes metaphors as he illustrates the next identity of the Church.

Ephesians 2:19-222

**19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,<sup>[d]</sup> but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy

*temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by[e] the Spirit.*

This is the part of the sermon that I will begin asking random questions to distract you from my main point... OK bare with me here.

When you got up this morning, you turned off your alarm... or maybe raced to the washroom, at some point you all had the thought...

Oh, it's Sunday, I HAVE TO GO TO..... (church)

Let's try it again, it's Sunday, I HAVE TO GO TO... (church!)

Man you are all so wrong. I gotcha so bad. This building, despite being so beautiful with its praying hands, high ceiling and beautiful orange carpet, this is just a building. Our incredible building expansion that we have in the works, that is also just a building, a tool. A very nice tool that can be used for incredible kingdom-building, but only if we can clearly live out the identity that Paul talks about in this passage.

We need to become the Temple of God as a people. A place that welcomes God's presence here on earth. We look to the example of the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, that was commanded by God in Exodus 25 verse 8, "8 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst." This was God's desire with the Israelites, but even wider, to exist in the world that He created. The big difference is that God does not need or desire a temporary building or structure to be present- He is present through the community of His people, the followers of Jesus, the CHURCH.

Solomon's Temple later served to remind the Israelites that their God was alive and present, and displayed the power and might of God's Kingdom to those foreigners of the God that the Israelites served.

With Christ as our cornerstone, we are to together comprise the Temple of God, to stand out from the rest of the world as a display of God's love for his creation. This command was given by Jesus on his sermon on the mount,

**Matthew 5:14-16**

**14** "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.**15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that [b] they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

This does not mean that we are to hide from the rest of the world... but rather, when we gather together as the Church, just like we do this morning- our purpose is to reflect the glory of God to all those around us. Wherever we are, we are acting as the church- our lives need to embody the identity of being God's Temple.

We need to redefining our perspective... we need to worship AS the Temple of God, not just AT the building that we call the church. Does my life resemble one that glorifies my creator? When I sing with my brothers and sisters, am I singing words that reflect my life from Monday to Saturday? Or am I just here to be part of the rock concert?

Being the Temple of God means that we as the church need to be willing to act as ambassadors of God's Kingdom to the people that we interact with- whether it is through word, through deed, is our light hidden to avoid the attention of criticism of others? Or are we bold enough, do we care enough, to let it shine every day, regardless of circumstances?

## We are: the Body of Christ

Finally we come to a term that is used frequently by Paul in his Epistles to the church. An identity of the Church that describes the Church not as a passive or incapable entity, but rather an active and living organism that was created to live out God's purpose. We are the Body of Christ.

If I were to look from the outside, as an unbeliever, this is probably the identity that the Church struggles with the most to embody.

The body of Christ is a challenge for the Church to live out because it requires a commitment for us to work as a team, to practice the self-awareness of recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of ourselves, as well as allowing others to use their gifts to serve the body. What good are we as part of the body if we are too stubborn to work with others? In his letter to the Corinthians Paul makes sure they understand how the body really works:

*1 Cor. 12:15-16 (NLT)*

*"If your foot says, 'I'm not a part of the body because I'm not a hand,' that doesn't make it any less a part of the body. And if your ear says, 'I'm not part of the body because I'm only an ear and not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body?"*

I think we have all experienced this in our lives at different times, when we are tasked with a role that although maybe we enjoy, it is not the place that God has gifted us to serve.

For all of you baseball fans, it makes me think of a young pitcher on the Blue Jays that made his debut in the Major Leagues this year, Carlos Ramirez.

As a young man he was signed in the Dominican Republic with the aspirations to be an Outfielder, playing defense, hitting home runs and stealing bases. Unfortunately for him, his lack of skill as a hitter meant that he spent five seasons toiling in the minor leagues, never making it anywhere close to the Majors. However, after struggling and realizing that he was not gifted in hitting, he made the decision to try pitching, as he had a very strong arm. When he finally recognized where he was gifted, it only took him a season to make it to the Major Leagues- and now he has promise in a career where he can be a critical part of the Blue Jays pitching staff.

For Carlos Ramirez it took the wisdom to listen to the advice of those around him- to realize that his gifts could be used for the purpose of the team, but only if he was willing to submit to the good of the team. It is the same way in the church... We cannot all be home run hitting outfielders or fireballing pitchers, our diversity of gifts is crucial to making the church body work.

If we turn our attention back to Ephesians we see that Paul addressed these various gifts with the church as well...

*Ephesians 4*

**11** Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. **12** Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. **13** This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

We need everyone, and I mean everyone to play a role in the body. This text mentions specific roles that are important for certain members of the body to play- the apostles, prophets, evangelists, the pastors and teachers. It doesn't end with that. The reality is, that in whatever way you are gifted to serve, there is a place for you in the body. And more than that, it is your responsibility that once you are part of the body, to fulfil the function that you are gifted with. We need people to serve as the hands, the feet, the

ears... even the kidneys ( I don't know what the kidneys do in the body of Christ exactly) but we definitely need them to!

The unfortunate reality is that the Church does not operate properly when its members are not fulfilling their role. This causes a strain on others because the body needs to operate, so the willing members begin to stretch themselves to fulfil those roles. As you can understand I'm sure, a foot is not going to do a very good job trying to act as the ear, so the whole body suffers.

There are so many ways for you to serve the body, and some of them are in ways that you maybe never thought of. If you are someone who has considered being an active part of the church body, maybe today is the day you decide to take action. Our staff leadership team is here excited to connect you to a ministry and ministry leader who would value your gifts. No gift is less than another, and they can be used to bring glory to God as we live out his purpose for the Church.

You ARE called to belong, and belonging begins with committing to being part of the CHURCH. I know there are introverts out there, or even people who are thinking, "I have no gifts, what am I supposed to do?" I am not saying that being part of the Church always makes life easier, the reality is that relationship is messy. Sometimes we are let down or disappointed by our brothers and sisters, and because of that we are tempted to throw it all away. I know that I have been a disappointment to others, and I have been disappointed by others. But our purpose as followers of Christ supersedes our personal desire for comfort and fear of being hurt.

In closing, Paul's instruction is that we are fellow citizens and to be the household of God. Let us live out that reality TOGETHER, because we are called to BELONG.

Let's Pray.