



**A PLACE TO BELONG**  
**WEEK 2 of 8 ~ A Place To Find Acceptance**

**All the way through until Christmas, we are talking about how our church is A Place To Belong. We said last week that the three essentials for human life are food, shelter and LOVE. As primal as our need for food and shelter, or need for love, our need to belong to others, is the primary thing that makes us human. Right at the beginning, when there was only one human, God said this:**

***“It is not good for the [human] to be alone...” ~ Genesis 2:18***

**Last week we said that Waikoloa Community Church is A Place To Find Love. We proved to you that you are a lovable person and we proved that regardless of what you have come to believe about God in your own life experience up until now, regardless of what you have been taught, the God I know, when He thinks of you, overflowing love bursts from His heart and a giant smile overwhelmed His face! You really felt that love last week and MANY of you told me about it on your way out with tears of joy, love and belonging in your eyes! YAY GOD!?!**

**As much as everyone really, at their core, wants to belong, belonging easily escapes us. We are often disappointed by the very people we thought we were most strongly connected to.**

**But what if you found a community that would always include you ~ what if you found a place that didn't stop at just welcoming you, but a place that actually valued you just as you are. What if you found a place where they accepted you just as you are, but also loved you too much to leave you there? Let me tell you a story about a place I heard about just like that.**

**I heard a story about a family gathered around their big oak table for dinner one night. The grandmother of the family was delighting one of her granddaughters by delicately lifting to her mouth a small strand of peas balanced on the blade of her butter knife. All but one pea made it into her mouth, and everyone clapped. Then she told the family the story behind this unorthodox eating technique. She said:**

**“When I was little we didn't have much. It was the Depression. But we did have a table full of food because my father grew wonderful vegetables. Lots of hobos who had jumped from the train wandered onto our property, looking for a meal. More often than not an extra seat was pulled up to our dinner table.**

**“One summer afternoon I was sweeping the kitchen floor when my father's voice came through the screen door: ‘Lizzy, set another plate. We have company tonight.’ Our guest paused in the doorway, and dipped his head in a gesture of gratitude. ‘Looks like he doesn't speak much English,’ Dad said, ‘but he's hungry like we are. His name is Henry.’**

**“When dinner was ready Henry stood until we were all seated, then gently perched on the edge of his chair, his head bowed and his hat in his lap. The blessing was said and dishes were passed from hand to hand. We all waited, as was proper, for our guest to take the first bite. Henry must have been so hungry he didn't notice us watching him as he grabbed his knife. Carefully he slid the blade into the pile of peas before him, and then lifted a quivering row to his mouth without spilling a single pea. He was eating with his knife! I looked at my sister May and we covered our mouths to muffle our snickers. Henry took another knife full, and then another.**

**My father, taking note of the glances we were exchanging, firmly set down his fork. He looked me in the eye, then took his knife and thrust it into the peas on his plate. Most of them fell off as he attempted to lift them to his mouth, but he continued until all the peas were gone.**

**Dad never did use his fork that evening, because Henry didn't. It was one of my father's silent lessons in acceptance. He understood the need for this man to maintain his dignity, to feel comfortable in a strange place with people of different customs. Even at my young age I understood the greatness of my father's simple act of brotherhood and acceptance.” Then she paused, winked at her granddaughter and slid her butter knife back into a mountain of peas.**

Maybe you can identify with Henry in that story. Maybe you feel a little out of place, unsure, hoping people will accept you for you you are. Well, God sent me here to tell you that you are not here by accident this morning. Despite any fears or second thoughts or reservations you may have had about coming here today you did come. Why? Because you have been drawn here by the Spirit of God to find acceptance. That's what this place is! Waikoloa Community Church is a Place to Find Acceptance. Doesn't that sound wonderful?

If that sounds wonderful to you would you turn to a neighbor and say "That sounds wonderful." Now turn to the neighbor on the other side, the one who was your second choice and tell them the same thing. "That sounds wonderful." As wonderful as that sounds, it's not pie in the sky thinking. It is real. Look at two things the Apostle Paul has to say about ACCEPTANCE.

### **1) WE ARE COMMANDED TO ACCEPT IN THE WAY WE WERE ACCEPTED!**

*Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. ~ Romans 15:5-7*

So, let's break this down a little bit. What does God give each of us? Perseverance and encouragement. If you've walked with God, if you've followed Jesus for any length of time you can affirm this, you can give multiple testimonies of this truth. There have been times when God encouraged you, supported you, lifted you up, helped you keep going, carried the load and gave you time to come around to the right decision in life yeah? OF COURSE YOU CAN! So, Paul's prayer here is that the same God who does all that for you also help you be of a mind to treat other people the same way He treats you! That way we can stay unified and with one, unified voice glorify God.

Now, think about this last part of the passage. When you were accepted by Jesus, what were you like? Were you perfectly holy, completely without sin and exactly the same as Jesus in character, opinion, faith and actions? Is that why He accepted you, because you were already exactly like Him? No, of course not. So, based on that, what is the rule for the people we are now called to accept? Do they have to have a lifestyle, morals, ethics, character, actions, thoughts, opinions, exactly the same as ours, or at least ones that we approve of and agree with before we have to accept them? Let's check Paul's words again to make sure we don't miss this. Paul says: Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. ACCEPT one another just as Christ ALSO ACCEPTED us.

**We know the answer don't we? It's not difficult. It's not rocket surgery! Don't reject people who are different from you in some way, instead accept people no matter how different from you they are, in the same way that Christ accepted you. How did Christ accept you? The answer comes from understanding the Greek word we translate here as ACCEPT in English. It comes from the root word**

**Proslambánō (GREEK) ~ Accept (ENGLISH)**

**"To be drawing to yourself"**

**Proslambano is actually made up of two words...**

**Pros ~ "Toward" and Lambano ~ "Lay hold of with initiative"**

**To aggressively receive with strong personal interest.**

**To take to oneself, To take as one's companion, To take by the hand to lead**

**To receive into one's home with kindness, To provide shelter**

**To grant access to one's heart, To take as a friend**

**Now, doesn't being accepted by someone in that way sound pretty wonderful? It really does right? Tell both your neighbors, "Wow! It really IS wonderful!" This is what Jesus did for us. He draws us to Himself as His companions. He loves us and takes us by the hand and leads us. He treats us with kindness, invited us into his home, into his family, shelters us, cares for us, shares His heart with us, He calls us His friends. There is a wonderful chorus by Israel Houghton about this idea:**

***Who am I that you are mindful of me, That you hear me, when I call***

***Is it true that you are thinking of me, How you love me,***

***It's amazing! It's amazing!***

***I am a friend of God! I am a friend of God! I am a friend of God!***

***He calls me friend! God almighty! Lord of glory! You have called me friend!***

**When Jesus accepted us, He called us friend, even when He doesn't necessarily agree with everything we do, think or believe. And this is what we do here at this church as well. We accept one another. We call each other friends. We receive each other into our homes with kindness, we provide shelter to each other, we grant access to our hearts, we offer friendship, we lay hold of each other with initiative, we aggressively invite and receive with strong personal interest.**

**Maybe you have heard someone say, or you have said it yourself, "Well God says I HAVE to LOVE them but I don't have to LIKE them." Have you ever said that about someone? "I love them but I don't like them." Last week, we talked about how we love you because God loves you. I told you I love you and I mean it! I really do.**

**Some people have trouble hearing that. They have trouble believing that. Because someone has told them they loved them in the past but then, when push came to shove, they showed that they didn't really love them. It was a lie. Well, this week, I am telling you something even harder to believe but just as I promise you it really is true that I love you, I also like you! I like you, just as you are. I accept you just as you are! I want to be your friend and I want you to be my friend.**

**My mentor and friend John Maxwell begins every talk with this phrase: "My name's John, and I'm your friend." - I hate to steal that from him but I just love it so much I'm going to borrow it. "My name's Greg, and I'm your friend." I really am your friend. I love you and I like you and I accept you, just the way you are. Now, that brings me to my second point this morning.**

## **2) ACCEPTING IS NOT ENABLING!**

**Now, we've also repeatedly said I can love you and I can like you without 100% agreeing with everything you think or do, yeah? That's what Jesus does. Even when we insist on continuing with a besetting sin, Jesus still loves us, He still likes us. He doesn't like that we are engaging in that harmful behavior, but it doesn't change his love or liking or accepting of us.**

**So, you and me, for example, we may have political differences, moral or ethical opinion differences, interpretations of Scripture or doctrine differences, priority differences, on and on and on.**

**Even though I may 100% disagree with you in the strongest possible terms about some of your choices, opinions, actions, etc. that does NOT change the FACT that I still really do love you and I still really do like you and I still really do accept you just as you are. I AM your friend and as your friend, just like your friend Jesus does, I am also telling you I love you so much I love you enough to not leave you where I find you. If I think you are wrong about something, if I think you are missing out on something better, if I think you are stuck in a sinful behavior, some harmful behavior, I am going to do my best to convince you to move to a better, more correct position.**

**AND if you love me, if you like me, if you accept me, I fully expect you to do the same for me. I realize I am not Jesus and I realize I could be the one in the wrong about any of these differences of opinion that you and I have. I am wrong in life, FREQUENTLY, just ask Annette. Adamantly disagreeing with each other about stuff doesn't mean we can't be friends and being friends who accept each other doesn't mean we can't earnestly try to convince the other of our way of thinking. Look at what the author of Hebrews says about this in Hebrews 12:5-6**

***And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and he chastens everyone He accepts as His son.  
~ Hebrews 12:5-6***

**Elegchó (GREEK) ~ Rebukes (ENGLISH)  
to convince with solid, compelling evidence,  
especially to expose (prove wrong, connect).**

**Paideuó (GREEK) ~ Disciplines (ENGLISH)  
To educate or instruct by training.**

Notice these forms of rebuking and disciplining are not the same as harshly judging someone. This is not to be done with a critical or combative spirit. We are not trying to win an argument, we are trying to win over a friend. Notice, we are told God's motivation for this attempt at correction is always love, encouragement and acceptance. Not convincing you isn't going to make Him reject you. He will still continue to love and accept you. If we are friends and I ever rebuke or discipline you, either through a message like this or in an aloha group or a private conversation, please believe that is my motivation as well. I'm not trying to beat you, I am trying to win you over. I am not trying to shove you the direction I want you to go. I am trying to draw you and attract you toward what I think is a better way for you. That's what God does as well. Remember that verse from Jeremiah 31:3 last week?

***I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. ~ Jeremiah 31:3***

For example, if I believe that playing on the edge of a cliff is dangerous to you, because I love, encourage and accept you am going to do my best to convince you to do otherwise, while still respecting your choice to hang out on the cliff if you wish. I am going to try to attract you, draw you my direction. I am going to still love you right where I find you, but I am also going to love you too much to leave you there. You can insert any other behavior, opinion, philosophy, action, into my cliff example and it's the same idea. If you tell me you think you should be sexually promiscuous or shooting heroin I am going to do my best to rebuke that, and disciple you. I am going to try to convince you of a different plan God has for your life. But I will still love and accept you even if I can't change your mind. Likewise if I share an opinion or exhibit a behavior that you feel is bad for me, don't pass judgement on me, don't write me off and don't shove me or treat me harshly. Don't try to beat me, where you win the argument and I lose, but certainly, absolutely, please do your best to convince me there might be a better way, that I might be missing out on God's best way for my life.

**Don't let me miss it just because you have to disagree with me. Love me where you find me, but also love me too much to leave me there. That's what you do with family. That's what you do when you know you belong. When you find a safe place to belong you can disagree with each other and yet still love, like and accept each other. That's what church is supposed to be! A Place to Find Acceptance. I believe that is exactly what this church is and I am so glad you have found your way here. Or perhaps you were drawn here by loving kindness, by an invitation from someone who loves you and wants the best for you in the future, while still accepting you for who you are right now.**

**I hope you feel that way today that you have found a place to belong, a place to find love and a place to find acceptance. It's exciting and soothing and fulfilling all at once when you find a place like that. Everyone here in our church is not the same and none of us are perfect the way we are. We all have room for growth, for change. Remember we said last week that we are ALL broken but healing people. Churches are far from perfect. Like we said last week, if you ever find a perfect church please don't join us because then you will instantly ruin it since you aren't perfect. No church is perfect, but I have found that this primal human need to be accepted can best be filled by the local church, when it is working right. When the local church is working right, it is the hope of the world.**

**Everyone, no where where they are on this journey we call life, everyone needs to find a place where they can find acceptance. There is something inside every one of us that longs to be laid hold of with initiative, longs to be intentionally and aggressively received with strong personal interest by someone who only wants to be our friend. We all long to have friends who receive us into their hearts and homes. We all long for other people who accept us, who not only love us because God told us we have to love everyone, but who actually choose to intentionally like us, even when we are at our most unlikeable.**

**I have found a place like that here at Waikoloa Community Church and I hope you have too. A place that you can really call "home." A place where you will always be accepted just as you are and a place where you also commit to accepting all of us just as we are. Because, you know, God never meant for your home to be a shell you climb into to hide from a world that doesn't accept you. Home is the people who are always there for you, who always leave the door open for you, even when you are at your worst.**

**~~~~~ LET'S PRAY ~~~~~**

## **MESSAGE NOTES**

*“It is not good for the [human] to be alone...” ~ Genesis 2:18*

### **1) WE ARE COMMANDED TO ACCEPT IN THE WAY WE WERE ACCEPTED!**

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**GO DEEPER**  
**ALOHA GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**READ: Genesis 2:18**

- 1) Why do you think God said this? Why did the first human need another human? Is it also true that “It is not good for God to be alone?” Why or why not? Is it possible for God to be alone?
- 2) Do you think our need for community stems from being made in God’s image? Why or why not?

**READ: Romans 15:5-7**

- 1) What does it mean to “be of the same mind with one another?” Does that mean we have to agree 100% about everything? Why or why not? Are there boundaries or is everything fair game?
- 2) Who was the first friend that you remember? Do you remember how the friendship started? Did you ask them to become your friend or did they ask you? What was it about them that made them feel like a friend? Did you agree on everything? When you had disagreements how did you settle them?
- 3) How do you know when someone has “accepted” you?” How do you show someone else that they have been “accepted” by you?

**READ: Hebrews 12:5-6**

- 1) Pastor Greg shared how rebuking and disciplining are not the same thing as judging. Do you agree or disagree?**
- 2) Can you share an example of how you would rebuke a Christian brother or sister without passing judgment on them at the same time? Is that easy or difficult to do? Why? What does your motivation need to be to do it right?

**READ: Jeremiah 31:3**

- 1) What does it mean to be “drawn by lovingkindness?” Have you already come to faith in Jesus? How did that happen? Did you feel like you were pushed into it or drawn toward it?
- 2) If you are not yet a follower of Christ, which method would be most effective in convincing you to follow Jesus? Being pushed toward Him or being drawn toward Him? What would draw you in this way? Conversely, what would repel you?