Ladies of Grace Blog BELONGING 

February 2019 Week3 Kristen Wetherell

It started my first day of Kindergarten. Not a familiar face in the classroom. Gathering on the orange shag rug in front of the chalkboard hearing introductions through a fog of insecurity… “Jennifer, 5 years old; Josh, 5; Pam, 5; Julie, 6; Eric, 5; Michelle, 4”….wait…did I just hear 4? Four years old? Someone else in this room is only 4 just like me?! Instant connection. My first friend.

**BELONGING**

Fast forward to the middle school playground, where clubs formed and fell apart all in 30 minutes time. Why did I want to be a part of Nicole’s club so badly? **BELONGING**

High school tryouts for sports seasons; waiting to hear if I was good enough to make the cut. Had I proven myself to be worthy of a place on the team?

**BELONGING**

Standing at the altar exchanging rings and vows. Promising forever love. Hearing the pronouncement of husband and wife. Taking his name to be my own.

**BELONGING**

No matter the age, no matter the stage of life, we all need a place to belong. It is as essential as breathing to feel connected and accepted and loved even if only by one special person. My husband knows he does not need to bring me flowers or chocolates or jewelry on Valentine’s Day, because what my heart craves most are words of affirming love that I am still his and he is still mine even after all of these years. It is much the same in my relationship with God. The more I open my Bible, the more I am convinced it is truly a personal love letter from my God. He has filled it with words of affirmation and belonging, giving His Holy Spirit to translate it into my own heart language. If ever I am in need of a “valentine”, one of my favorite places to go is Isaiah 43:1-4 (MSG), where I have literally drawn a big heart around these treasured verses…

*But now, GOD’s Message, the God*

*who made you in the first place, Jacob, the*

*One who got you started, Israel: “Don’t be afraid, I’ve*

*redeemed you. I’ve called your name. You’re mine.*

*When you’re in over your head, I’ll be there with you.*

*When you’re in rough waters, you will not go down.*

*When you’re between a rock and a hard place,*

*it won’t be a dead end – Because I am GOD,*

*your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your*

*Savior. I paid a huge price for you: all of*

*Egypt, with rich Cush and Seba thrown*

*in! That’s how much you mean*

*to me! That’s how much*

*I love you!”*

What must it have been like to encounter *the Word* who *became flesh and made his dwelling among us*, to have seen *the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14 NIV)? He must have been like a walking valentine to the people who encountered him… fisherman in a moment dropped their nets to follow him, the woman at the well immediately dropped her guard as he looked straight into her heart, Zacchaeus dropped his money bags to take hold of a far greater treasure and John’s greatest boast was in seeing himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved”. In Jesus Christ, our hearts find their true home. The one who formed our hearts is the one who understands our hearts most completely. (*He made their hearts, so he understands everything they do. Psalm 33:15 NLT)* Where there is understanding and compassion, there is belonging.