



# YOU BELONG

52 STORIES TO STRENGTHEN YOUR  
PURPOSE, FAITH & RELATIONSHIPS

FROM BELONG TOUR SPEAKERS AND FRIENDS

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52 STORIES TO STRENGTHEN YOUR  
PURPOSE, FAITH & RELATIONSHIPS

BELONG *tour*



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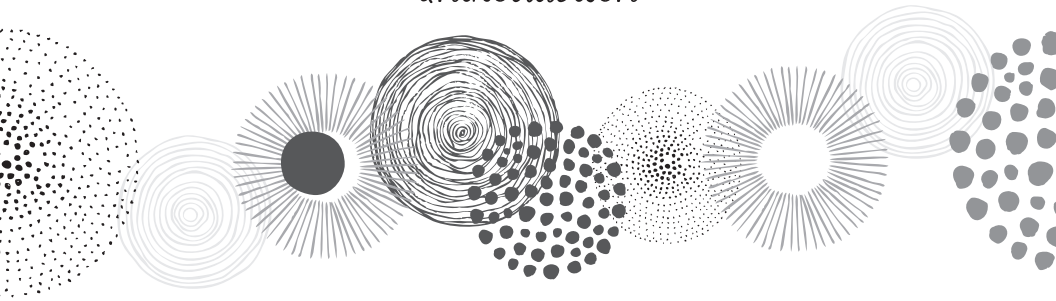
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## Introduction



A few months after my mother's death I had the opportunity to go on my first-ever cruise. The previous couple of years had been hard; her slow decline and eventual release had been both heartbreaking and exhausting. But now I was coming out of the fog, and a week of someone else cleaning and cooking gourmet meals for me while I sat watching the world go by seemed like the very thing to ease my aching heart.

As a cruise newbie, I was surprised by the amount of paperwork the company felt it needed before they let me embark on the ship. But I'm a rule follower by nature, so I sat down at my desk one evening to dutifully fill in all the blanks. It was the usual sort of thing: name, address, phone, etc. No big deal, right? Until I got to the question that stopped me cold: *Who should we contact in case of emergency?*

*I . . . I don't know*, I thought, staring at the page. *I don't belong to anybody.*

While I could make the case that I belong to God, I couldn't exactly list *him* as my emergency contact. I didn't



have his phone number. Besides, if anything was to happen to me, he would already know, so there would be no need to fill him in. I briefly thought about enlisting my cat—considering that the odds of my experiencing an actual emergency were slim and it would, at least, give me a name for the form—but if something *did* happen I'd feel pretty stupid when a medical team tried to gather vital intel only to have all their questions answered with “meow.” When I narrowed my choices to living humans, my options were limited: My mother was the last living member of my immediate family. I'm not married and don't have a roommate. I did have friends and extended family members who would no doubt be willing to lend their name to my form, but they didn't *have* to. They weren't ordinarily responsible for me. I didn't really *belong* to them.

Belonging is one of those things we often take for granted. Sometimes it's even annoying to be stuck with people you don't want to deal with at that moment. And sometimes (junior high springs to mind) it's the most vitally important thing ever in the history of the universe to belong to the “right” crowd (whoever they may be). But most of the time it just is. We belong . . . or we don't.

The following pages contain fifty-two stories about belonging, one for each week of the year. They address purpose, identity, and relationships (with others, yourself, and God), because all those things are seen from the perspective of where, when, and to whom you belong. Each story ends with a prayer, a thought to consider, or an idea to put into

## INTRODUCTION

practice that week. Try not to rush from one page to the next; let the content settle into your heart and mind as you grow in your understanding of what it means to belong.

For two weeks that form sat on my desk while I tried to come to terms with my new reality. I eventually landed on a name to fill in that blank, but I haven't looked at belonging the same way since. As you make your way through the stories in this book, I hope you also will gain a new perspective on what it means to belong. Because you do. You belong with family, friends, and groups. You belong to yourself. You belong in a specific place and time, for a reason. You belong to your Creator.

You belong.

—*Susan Ellingburg, Editor*



# A TIME TO TEAR; A TIME TO MEND

*Nichole Nordeman*

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*For everything there is a season,  
a time for every activity under heaven.*

**ECCLESIASTES 3:1**



As a newly single mom, overwhelmed by basic banking, I have been a very happy renter. Home ownership feels scary on my own, and one of my favorite people in the galaxy is my landlord, Sam, who is essentially what would happen if Santa and Pope Francis had a younger brother. I know it's time to be a big girl home owner, but I'm probably going to ask Sam and his wife to live with me and my kids.

Recently, I decided to attend the open house of a listing I'd been obsessing about. The real estate agent explained that the home was owned by an older gentleman who'd raised his family there since 1969. He'd recently lost his wife and would be moving out west to be closer to his adult children,

who could help him navigate around his grief and a few less stairs.

While it had been immaculately maintained, the house had not been updated, ever. It was frozen in time. I half expected Carol Brady (or Alice, I guess) to come around the corner with a plate of warm cookies.

As good real estate agents do, they had encouraged the owner to “depersonalize” the house as much as possible. There were no family pictures. But I could see them anyway.

I could almost hear the sound of little feet in the hallway. The frustrated slamming of teenage doors. Piano lessons. The “Happy Birthday” song. And I could almost smell bread baking in the now vintage oven.

The last room I peeked in was the laundry room. There in the corner were spools and spools of colored thread, mounted on the wall above a humble little sewing table and chair, the only real evidence of the woman the homeowner had buried not long ago. Tears stung my eyes as I imagined him walking through the house with the agent, heavy and reluctant, tucking away her knickknacks and World’s Greatest Grandma mugs, but ultimately refusing to put away her thread. *I’m sorry. The sewing table stays.*

I knew in an instant that she’d sewn every Halloween costume. Probably a wedding dress. She’d hemmed skirts. Replaced buttons. I knew this had been her life’s work. Loving her family through the eye of a needle.

I went home making silly promises to myself that if I bought this house, I’d ask to leave the thread on the wall

and learn how to use it. I'd continue her beautiful legacy. I'd update the Stone Age appliances, mind you, but I would be a seamstress. I would stitch together everything in my life that had fallen apart, like she could have. I'd make everything beautiful like she had.

When I was very small and my parents were on the tight budget of an Air Force family, my mom sewed all my clothes. She was very good at it, but I hated them. None of the other little girls had homemade clothes. I just wanted a regular JCPenney dress, like everyone else. I wore my clothing dutifully (because the only other real option was nudity), but I wasn't happy about it and made sure my mom knew.

One summer vacation, my suitcase, thought to be tied securely to the roof of our station wagon, went flying off somewhere around Albuquerque. My mom had spent months sewing culottes and matching shirts for me, and when we realized the suitcase was gone, I did such a happy touchdown dance inside. My former life as Laura Ingalls Wilder was strewn across some blessed interstate, and now there would be no choice but to hit the local mall. My dancing ended when I saw my mom's face in her hands and watched the tears come down.

It was not just the long hours at her sewing machine that were blowing across some field now, but her very heart. Every carefully chosen pattern, fabric, and stitch had been done out of love for me. I started to cry too. I wanted my dad to drive back so I could run across the highway and collect every itchy ruffled collar. I hated myself for not loving everything my mother had ever made me.

In typical fashion, my mom dried her tears and mine and dug deep to find some enthusiasm on our way to the mall. *That was then. This is now. Let's get you some cute clothes.*

In the second chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is having yet another showdown with the Pharisees. They like things the old way. As part of a larger parable, Jesus offers a quick sewing lesson.

He wonders aloud, "Why would you try to patch up an old garment with a piece of new cloth? If the new cloth hasn't been treated properly (preshrunk), its fibers will be weakened. After a wash or two, it's going to tear away from the old. It's going to leave a bigger hole than the one you thought you were repairing. Don't attach me to old, comfortable things. I didn't come to fix holes.

"That was then. I'm the now.

"I'm the new."

There have been holes in my life, at times, begging for simple repair. It's harder, I think, to identify the times that beg for brand-new beginnings. When your suitcase flies off the car roof and you've got nothing left to wear. When the ghost of a woman at her sewing table (or anyone's ghost) makes you want to live her life and not your own. Trying to sew new cloth to old cloth, when you know it won't hold, because it wasn't meant to.

When the Pharisee in you says, "But, but, but . . . what about *the old things*?" the Jesus in you says, "That was then.

"Behold, I am making all things new."

PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK . . .

*Lord, I can't reach out and take hold of the new life you offer if my hands are clenched around things I need to let go. I don't want my "then" to stand in the way of the "now" you have for me. Please help me determine what to hang on to and what to let fall away.*