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# The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups

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## **The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups** Joseph R. Myers

A practical guide for those struggling to build a community of believers in a culture that wants to experience belonging over believing Who is my neighbor? Who belongs to me? To whom do I belong? These are timeless questions that guide the church to its fundamental calling. Today terms like neighbor, family, and congregation are being redefined. People are searching to belong in new places and experiences. The church needs to adapt its interpretations, definitions, and language to make sense in the changing culture. This book equips congregations and church leaders with tools to:

- Discern the key ingredients people look for in community
- Understand the use of space as a key element for experiencing belonging and community
- Develop the “chemical compound” that produces an environment for community to spontaneously emerge
- Discover how language promotes specific spatial belonging and then use this knowledge to build an effective vocabulary for community development
- Create an assessment tool for evaluating organizational and personal community health

## **The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups for online ebook**

### **Jeremy Piehler says**

#### **Great book.**

The biggest take away for me was starting to understand the importance of LOTS of types of belonging. The 4 spaces is key!

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### **Steve Johnson says**

Myers has some good ideas, but he falls into a very scary, post-modern trap. He confuses what people want with what people need and are ask to be. The people in question are the Church. People want to belong to something. (I agree.) They want to belong as they want to belong. (This is true.) So the church should let them, even encourage them to belong however they feel is fulfilling. (Hmmm?) This means that if someone wants to belong like a football fan belongs to the team--cheering from the sidelines--then the church should applaud that. (I firmly disagree.)

Myers doesn't seem to account for the kind of community that the church is called to be. That is, the church is called to be fully committed to the vision. To agree with Myers is to say that if your favorite football player decided one day that they would live out their commitment to the team by buying a team jersey and sitting in the stand, that would be good enough for the team and no one should question their commitment. Followers of Christ are not fans. We are participants in the game. To make them fans because they the don't want to commit to anything else sells them short and falls short in Christ's call.

If there is anything to save from this book it is that Myers pushes the church toward communities rather than being committee-driven organization. That's a step, but he needs to take the leap. I also appreciate the encouragement for community development through spontaneous formation. This is harder to write in a business plan but will insure more natural and healthier communities.

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### **David Eversole says**

This book made me think differently about small groups in the church and about how we bring people in as a whole. I have not quite digested all of it or settled it in my mind, but I appreciate being challenged in thought. It was not, however, very practical. I would like to have seen more detail as to how these thoughts could / should be implemented by the church.

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### **Brent says**

As a church consultant, Myers applies social theories about space and culture to guide churches in seeing the connection between all of the beneficial “spaces” that move people along in their faith journeys. I like

Myers' fresh thinking, but I can't agree with his laissez faire applications.

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### **Bruno says**

This book provides great insight on the level of connection we develop (or what to expect) and participate in our lives. The author defines relationships with other individuals or groups into what he calls the "four spaces". Although it's based on a religious background it provides a very natural and universal mapping into group relationships.

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### **Sam says**

Great perspective on work done in 60's called Proxemics, study of how physical space affects formation of community. Myers offers 4 categories of physical space: intimate, personal, social and public. He suggests keeping these in harmony when addressing how community forms. Some key insights are offered that will definitely make you rethink what you know about community.

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### **Jared says**

I really enjoyed this book. It helped me to be at peace with the "space" that relationships I have currently occupy. I've always felt this push to make any relationship closer to imbue it with any meaning or value. Now, I'm cool if I only have "social" relationships with others in different areas of my life. Not all relationships, including spiritual ones, need to be on a fully intimate level to be correct, healthy, meaningful or "right".

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### **Joe says**

This book challenges the assumptions behind how churches have done small group ministry over the ages and how we need to rethink our approach to ministry at the public, social, and personal levels.

The one place where I don't jive with the author is in his thoughts on personal space, which is essentially being so close to someone that they know everything about you and you're not ashamed. To me, this is at the very core of what faith is about, that is, in Christ, being able to stand before God and not be ashamed because you've been forgiven.

Given this, I'd suggest that the goal of the public, social, and personal spheres should all seek to point people towards this kind of private relationship with God.

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### **Tom Leary says**

This book changed the way I look at small groups and the definition of spiritual growth. Our church is

focused on working people down a path where they deepen their faith in God through attending more intimate community relationships, from public gatherings through community events and into personal small group relationships. Joe Myers has me thinking completely differently about that.

Joe describes the four levels of space people move through in different settings. He describes in detail and with examples each of the spaces (Public, Social, Personal and Intimate).

He comes up with a calculation where, for every 1 intimate friend you have, you'll have two personal friends, four social friends and 8 public friends. While this can't be a hard and true calculation, it helps define the number of people involved at different levels and shows that we shouldn't be trying to force people into personal friendships or intimate relationships with each-other, or even God.

The stories in between the descriptions are good and engaging. I did find it distracting to read the different quotes in the middle of text, sometimes breaking apart a thought that I'm trying to understand. It was especially distracting since these quotes are on about every other page in the book.

Overall this was a great book. Our youth leadership consultant also referenced this book in his youth leadership training for our church. If you have any responsibility in defining community or the path people take in their spiritual growth, it's a must-read.

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### **Scott Asher says**

Myers does a very good job of explaining his opinions about the four types of belonging (public, social, personal, and intimate.) I was impressed by his argument that it's OK for people in the church to stay in the public or social spaces; we don't need to, and shouldn't try to, push people towards intimacy.

The full review is posted at my blog, <http://ashertopia.blogspot.com>. This book was provided free of charge by the publisher as a review copy.

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### **Chris Little says**

I wavered between two options when it came to choosing a star rating for *The Search to Belong*. Because there are some powerfully helpful ideas, I considered four out of five. But everything else moved me towards two from five.

No matter which way I went, I knew that I disliked reading the book - even the bits I liked. So that decided the matter: \*\*/\*\*\*\*.

What's valuable: Myers picks up the analysis of Edward T Hall that society consists of four "spaces": public, social, personal, and intimate. Each space has its own character, strengths, and modes of operation. And each is valuable in its own right, not as a mere stepping stone to the "really real" relationship of intimacy.

So, applied to churches, Myers urges readers to make sure people have room to relate in any and all of the social spaces. Excellent!

What I disliked does not undermine the benefit of those valuable thoughts. But what I disliked I *really* disliked. Some examples.

Myers has an ear for how people feel. He frequently speaks of how he felt in different situations. That's a wonderful skill. But Myers turns how we feel into obligations: "people feel this **therefore we must** act in the following way." There is apparently no possibility of people feeling the wrong thing, or entertaining awful desires.

Similarly, we are told people at churches can only lead themselves. "Only you can lead you." It's imperative, therefore that 'leaders' in churches get out of the way. They can supply a framework for people to grow, but must refrain from trying to lead people. The irony: Myers forcefully tells us - leads us - to the only possible truth, that there is no such thing as forceful leading.

The irony is one thing, but more significant to me is the biblical insistence that there are leaders (in church, home, and society) and that these leaders have God's commission to lead. (See all the biblical language of authority and submission, to investigate further.)

For a third and final criticism, I think the book is a touch confused. In the first two chapters, for instance, Myers frequently spoke of the need to define connection, or community, or belonging. But I never found the definition. So I was not surprised to read a free interchange of terms: with loose definitions it's easy enough to use any term that feels close enough. But that's not good enough if you are trying to present a clear case.

My recommendation, then, is to read this book but to pare back the emergent packing and enjoy the thoughtful idea social spaces.

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### **Wayne Siggelkow says**

Upon first glance I did not think this book was for me based on subtitle of Rethinking community, intimacy and small groups. I anticipated a resource on creating strong small group ministries, but instead was treated to a philosophy of what it means to belong and that often we have unrealistic expectations or processes to see this happen. We all do want to belong, but want to do it authentically, not coerced by intentional or unintentional expectations put on us. Myers explores how churches communicate their message of what you need to look like to "belong" and the implications of such subtle acts. Completely fascinating read.

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### **Gary Ganong says**

This is a thorough study of the types of groups that appeal to different sectors of a church. He explains why certain beliefs about church activities are myths. He discusses the dynamics of religion in a post-modern world. He shows that there are limitations to small group activities and that the church must provide opportunities for public, social, personal and intimate interaction depending on the needs and personality of the individual.

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## **Clark says**

### **excellent and refreshing**

This book was just what I needed. I'd been praying about small groups and reading in the Scriptures in Acts. I had already been making similar conclusions - this book tied up a lot of loose ends and is helping me develop an appreciation for different modes of belonging. Excellent read for pastors and other leaders who are concerned about helping others belong!

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## **Rob Markley says**

Trying hard to remember this - I know it was a disappointment and I seem to recall it was all about trying to apply some sort of scientific methodology. People aren't machines

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