

The Three B's: Belief, Behave and Belong

A few years ago, I was introduced to the “Three B’s” of church: Believe, Behave and Belong. What first struck me about the Three B’s is that I knew what they each were, but I had never consciously thought about them in relationship to one another. The presenter was Rev. Dr. Michael Beck from “Fresh Expressions,” a ministry partner that seeks to inspire community-based ministries.

In his presentation, he shared the Three B’s as the operational order in which the church has historically sought to “make disciples of Jesus Christ. To summarize it simply, the traditional model of the Three B’s is Believe, Behave, and Belong. Before someone would seek a church home, they would have the beliefs that would make a Christian community meaningful to them. This person was likely raised in the church, and so joining a new church was a continuation of their childhood beliefs.

Second would be “Behaving. ”Here, we’re not necessarily talking about sitting still in worship (but we all remember getting the “eye” when we didn’t). Instead, behaving was about adhering, at least publicly, to the behavior expectations of the Christian community: not swearing, abstaining from alcohol, saying no to drugs, keeping “good” company, etc. Additionally, there were/are expectations of adherence to more specific cultural norms that are particular to a given church/community. Examples of this might have included political affiliations, community involvement, etc. Interestingly, you might note that not all expected behaviors were Biblically founded, but rather community-founded. Believers who wanted to be part of a church needed to meet the behavioral standards placed before them. Believers that didn’t often felt out of place.

Finally, we have “Belong. ”This is the feeling of being part of something. It’s here that we would start to hear talk of being part of a “church family,” and church as a “second home.” Belonging has typically been associated with having met the first two criteria of belief and behaving. If you checked those two boxes then typically, belonging would fall into place all on its own.

Having given a very brief primer on all three, I will say that the Three B’s where/are rarely explicitly talked about, planned or implemented. Instead, they are a way of interpreting learned and adoptive methods of discipling in the Christian church. It should also be said that you will see similar concepts applied in almost any social/religious setting. Your college fraternity or civic organization are not exempt from this!

Anyway, so much more can be said about each of the Three B’s, and so I’ll be doing that over the next few months of Connection Newsletter Articles, tackling one at a time with each article. For now, what I want to introduce to you is that the order of the Three B’s does not have to remain in the familiar order of “Believe,

Behave and Belong.” In fact, over the years, healthy churches have begun to re-write the order. More and more, the order is becoming “Belong, Believe, and then finally Behave.

With this new ordering, the focus is on helping people find their place in a Christian community, even if Christian beliefs haven't taken hold yet. At the belonging stage, beliefs and Christian behavior might be all over the place, but it is in that Christian community that beliefs begin to take form and behaviors begin to be shaped.

As we get ready to go through each of the Three B's, I want to encourage you to reflect on the following questions:

- Is the traditional order of "Believe, Behave and Belong" familiar to you? Did you grow up in a Christian community that embraced this?
- Have you ever felt like you had to "fake" belief or hide behavior in order to belong?
- What would it look like to focus on belonging as the first "B" in the life of the church?