

Can you quickly tell me which does not belong?

- a) Oval, ellipse, square or crescent ^[1]
- b) 3, 9, 11 or 13 ^[2]
- c) Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah or Hosea ^[3]

Maybe you grew up listening to the Sesame Street song, “One of these things is not like the others, one of these things doesn’t belong.” It was part of an educational tool designed to encourage children watching the show without adult supervision to engage their thinking processes. They were shown four pictures, then given an eight-bar musical interlude before having to think about which three were alike and which one did not belong. (Jeopardy contestants need sixteen bars!)

All of a) above are still useful shapes and informed by mathematical formulas. All of b) are numbers and represent specific quantities. And whether judge or prophet, their books are in the Biblical canon, and as stated in the first Salvation Army doctrine, “...were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.” So, all the writings in c) belong!

Christians, and Christian organizations might be tempted to use the Sesame Street approach in how they determine acceptable Christian standards or behaviours. “Which one doesn’t belong?” we might ask. While our Christian community should make us feel that we do belong—whoever we are—being part of the family of God transcends denomination. This song reminds us that it isn’t behaviour that separates us, nor religious tradition. Rather, it is a question of our “repentance offering abundant life,” fulfilled through “finding new life through the cross,” so that we may “follow as we belong.”

What brings us into the family of God? John tells us in his account of the Incarnation, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12 *ESV*). And as Paul stated later, “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19 *ESV*). Have you received new life through the cross? You are a child, then, of God, and given the right to consider yourself part of the family of God. This is where you belong!

Prayer

Our Father, thank You for accepting me as Your child, for providing forgiveness and cleansing through the cross. May I live to be like You, to bring glory to Your Name, and to love all, but especially my brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

[1] Answer: square – doesn’t have any curved sides

[2] Answer: 9 – not a prime number

[3] Answer: Joshua was a judge, not a prophet