



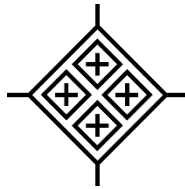
THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

WHAT DOES  
THE BIBLE SAY  
ABOUT COMMUNITY



JOSHUA CHATMAN

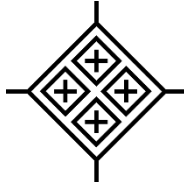
WHAT DOES THE  
BIBLE SAY ABOUT  
COMMUNITY



JOSHUA CHATMAN

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# INTRODUCTION

One night in 2015, my wife and I sat at our dining room table lamenting our loneliness. Yes, we had each other, but we lacked community. Our daily rhythms were wake up, workout, work, dinner, bed, and repeat. Our weekend rhythms were cleaning the house, grocery shopping, and going to church. We only spent time with people at work and at church. That night at our dining room table, we became painfully aware of how lonely we were. That night, we became painfully aware that we didn't have community. That night, we became painfully aware that we lived in isolation.

In God's kindness, we also became painfully aware that we didn't prioritize being community for others. We didn't initiate time with others. We didn't initiate conversations with people at church. We didn't invite church members into our home. We weren't cultivating and deepening friendships with people whom we held close. We were struggling with overcoming loneliness because we were waiting for it to happen to us rather than pursuing the meaning of community ourselves.

That night, the Lord led us to consider his example of humble service and sacrificial love (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:1-11). We repented of our self-centeredness regarding community. We determined that we would be community for others and trust God to provide community for us.

What about you? Are you lonely? Do you live an isolated lifestyle? Perhaps you are asking, "why do I feel lonely in church?" or looking for how to stop feeling lonely in a crowd.

If you were to look at your calendar and examine the past two to three months of your life, what does it reveal about your relationships with people? What does it say about your prioritization of Christian community

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and Christian fellowship? How many names are on it? How often have you hosted church members or a family in your home? How many times did you meet with the same people? How many weekends were spent with people? If you have rarely spent time with people, you probably live an isolated life.

Isolation means being separated from others. And here's the thing—it's not good. It goes against God's good design for humanity. In Genesis 1 and 2, God created a perfect world. Seven times he evaluated his work of creation and called it "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The first time God said something wasn't good was when he said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). This is the foundation of community in the Bible. God didn't make us to live in isolation.

God made us for relationships with people. You were born into a family that lived in a neighborhood that was part of a society. Therefore, isolation is not a situation or state to pursue but one to avoid. Many ask, "is isolation a sin or a season?" While there are seasons of quiet, the importance of social interaction is woven into our very nature.

Oftentimes, isolation is a disciplinary consequence. I was a disruptive kid in class, so the consequence was often in-school suspension. I had to sit in a cubicle, in a quiet room away from everyone, and sometimes I would have to stay there for the entire school day. It was miserable. Why? Because I had no human interactions. Consider solitary confinement, where a prisoner is placed in a cell for 22-24 hours a day with minimal human contact. This kind of punishment echoes Genesis 2:18: "It is not good for man to be alone." When we look at loneliness in the Bible, we see it is often a state from which God delivers His people.

Though it is not good to live in isolation, it is so easy to do. Isolation is comfortable and convenient. You don't have to wait on people. You don't have to consider others in your decisions of where to eat, what to watch, or when to workout. Living in isolation is less messy. Yet, it is also lonelier, joyless, and contrary to God's good design for image bearers, especially for his church. Overcoming social anxiety or overcoming the fear of vulnerability in community can be difficult, but the alternative is a shell of the life God intended.

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Isolation leads to destruction. A proverb shouts like a loud siren to warn of the danger of isolation. Proverbs 18:1 says, “One who isolates himself pursues selfish desires; he rebels against all sound wisdom.” This verse underscores the importance of community for our spiritual protection.

So how do we avoid isolation? By prioritizing and pursuing relationships with people. How do you pursue community? It’s by BEING community for others. Understanding what does the Bible say about community starts with realizing that we are called to move toward others just as Christ moved toward us.

# 1

## JOIN A CHURCH

### *Created for Community*

The true and living God is the Creator of all things (Gen. 1). He is relational, existing in a loving relationship within himself. The Trinity as a model for community shows us that God is one in his essence and subsists in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Gen. 1:1-2, John 1:1-4). Each person within the Trinity is fully God, yet there is only one God. He created human beings as the crown jewels of his creation. He made us in his image (Gen. 1:26-27).

Part of imaging God means reflecting and representing him. He created us for a relationship with himself and with fellow image bearers. One way we reflect his character (love, patience, kindness, truthfulness) is by living in relationships with others. Exploring what does the Bible say about community reveals that he created us to live in community. He made us to do life with other people, to rub shoulders with others, and to experience life's highs and lows together. By his wise design, we grow and mature not in isolation but through intentional relationships with his people (Eph. 4:15-16).

### *The Search for Community*

Activities like book clubs, fitness classes, trivia nights, etc. are all great ways to meet people. However, the best place to find Christian community is in a healthy, gospel-preaching local church. The church is the family of God (John 1:12–13; Eph. 1:4–5, 2:19). It consists of people who believe the gospel, who love Christ, who are committed to helping others follow him, and with whom you will spend eternity.

These are the kinds of people Christ graciously gives you for Christian fellowship. These are the kinds of people you ought to want as your community. God's answer to the problem of isolation is the local church.

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By God's grace, when you repented of your sins and believed the gospel, the Holy Spirit united you to Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:13-14). He also united you to his people in Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 2:11-16). Christ saved you individually, but not for isolation. He wants you to be among those who publicly identify with him—the church—and to do life with them. As you begin your search for a church community, remember, there is no perfect church. The church consists of sinners who are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:1-10). It consists of sinners who are being sanctified in Christ (1 Thess. 5:23-24). This means that the church is full of saved sinners who still commit sin and who are sinned against. The church consists of sinners who forgive and are forgiven. Therefore, know that your pursuit and experience of community will be messy. You will experience some disappointment, hurt, and heartache, which could push you towards isolation.

Don't let that deter you. When we read Bible verses about loneliness, we see that God is the Father of mercies and of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3-5). He can console you in your hurt. Also, having a community is worth experiencing and enduring some disappointment and discouragement. C.S. Lewis reminds us of this when he says:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.[1] Though the church is not perfect, it has a perfect Savior. He is maturing his church and will perfect it on the final day (2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 1:6). She is not what she will one day be (1 John 3:1-3). You won't find a perfect church. However, by God's grace, you can find a healthy church and build great community there. In your search for a church, prioritize one that is committed to sound doctrine and expositional preaching. You want a church that exalts Christ in the service, and especially in the sermon. Faithful gospel preaching has the same impact on a community that an engine has on a car. It's not the only part, but it's the most important part. You also want to know that the church practices hospitality in the Bible (Rom. 15:7) and that

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their love for one another is evident (John 13:34-35). Below are questions to consider asking yourself:

- Does this church lovingly welcome and greet one another and visitors?
- Have members introduced themselves to you, initiated conversations with you, or invited you to join them after service?

If the answer to these questions is “yes,” it is a strong sign that this is a good place to land and a way of overcoming the fear of vulnerability in community. In your search for community, it is best to choose a church where it is difficult to go unnoticed and easy to connect with others. This type of church will place you in a great position to avoid isolation and find the true meaning of community.

### ***Become a Church Member***

Once you have found the church, pursue church membership. It is the first step towards having a community. You want the community to consist of people who are fully committed to you, and you to them. The commitment serves as a greenhouse for meaningful relationships. It provides the context for the community to blossom. It opens the door for transparency and vulnerability, allowing you to lower your guard.

The commitment shouts “no matter what you share, I am here for you, and I will bear your burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).” Through church membership, you’ve officially become a family member of that family. Your membership serves as an invitation for the body to know you and be known by you. You have effectively made it harder for yourself to live in isolation and easier to live in community. By God’s grace, you have walked through the front door of a community fair that welcomes you into having rich, meaningful, and encouraging relationships with these people.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. How does knowing that God created you for community influence your pursuit of community?
2. Where have you looked for community? Why?
3. Why is church membership the first step towards living in community?

## 2

# SUNDAY SERVICE: SHOW UP EARLY, STICK AROUND AFTERWARDS

Now that you're a church member, it's time to take more active steps toward community. Though you've joined a church, community will likely not be automatic or instantaneous. It will take discipline and effort on your part. You will see the same people every Sunday at the church gathering (Heb. 10:24-25). This consistency makes it conducive to building community. It is good to take advantage of this opportunity.

A great way to position yourself to build a community within your church is to clear your Sunday calendar. As much as you can, guard it as a day to spend with church members. Then initiate with them. This is how you begin overcoming social anxiety and overcoming the fear of vulnerability in community. What does this look like? Here are a few ideas.

### ***Show Up Early to the Gathering***

As the church gathers for corporate worship, it's common to think of it like a trip to the movies. You arrive right before the movie starts. You don't talk with anyone who sits around you. You're there solely for your own good. Afterwards, you exit without talking to anyone. Now, this may be a fine thing to do at the movies, but these types of actions lead to a bad church experience. They contribute to isolation and serve as repellents to building community. You limit your ability to importance of social interaction,

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hindering your ability to build meaningful relationships. Therefore, it is wise to prioritize early arrival.

Try arriving 10-15 minutes before service begins. This allows time for one or two conversations before things begin. As you enter the building, don't ask yourself, "Who will engage me in conversation? Who will initiate a conversation with me?" Those questions flow from a self-centered mindset. Remember, Christ came not to be served but to serve (Mk 10:45). He calls you to love others as he has loved you (John 13:34-35).

Therefore, ask the Lord to help you enter the church building looking to the interests of others (Phil. 2:1-4). It may seem counterintuitive, but to have a community, you must contribute to it for the sake of others. You must care for others to have caring relationships. To have friends, you must prioritize being a friend and look to Bible verses about friendship for your model. It's as you strive to know people that you are usually known by them. So, enter the church with the mentality of a servant and ask yourself, "Who can I converse with? Who can I encourage?" Initiating conversations can be awkward and difficult. Trust me, I feel that! Also, most conversations are short and superficial. You ask, "How are you doing?" and someone responds, "I'm doing alright," and the conversation ends. You want to avoid this. A helpful way to initiate meaningful conversations is by having a few curated questions to spark them. Below are a few questions you could ask:

- How's your week been?
- What encouraged you this past week?
- What's bringing you joy in this season?
- Have you had a chance to look at the sermon text today? Any questions you hope the preacher answers?
- How was your faith encouraged this week?
- What discouraged you this past week?
- Has anything happened in the last week that I can be praying about for you?
- What was a high or low from the previous week?
- What's something you're grateful for this week?
- What does a typical week look like for you?

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With one or two intentional questions, conversations will naturally flow. As the person answers your questions, you will get to know them better, and vice versa. As you initiate, you can be an instrument in the Lord's hands that does them good. This is a practical step in how to find godly friends as an adult. As you pray for them and follow up the following week, you will likely form a friendship with them. As you make this a regular rhythm, you will get to know more people and lay a foundation for building Christian fellowship.

### ***Stick Around After Service***

When service ends, it is most tempting to grab your belongings and leave. You've been in service for over an hour. You may want to get home. You're hungry. You may not know anyone. No one may know you. You also wish to avoid the awkwardness of standing alone. Yet let me caution you against this action, as the habit of leaving immediately after service contributes to isolation. You close the door to know others and be known by them.

So, don't seize the opportunity to exit, but to engage with others instead. After service is a prime opportunity to invest and make relational deposits that can lead to rich friendships. This is how we live out Bible verses about community. You can look to start conversations with people who sat around you. After all, you're closest to them in proximity. You can also look around to see who is alone or not talking to anyone. You can make a beeline for them to talk. You can introduce yourself to them and ask how long they've been attending the church. You can also ask if they're from the area. After getting to know someone a bit, you can ask questions about the service and sermon. Below are a few questions you might offer:

- How did the Lord encourage you through the sermon?
- What was a particular point, cross-reference, or line that blessed you?
- What's a point from the sermon you want to meditate on more?
- What's one way you want to apply the sermon to your life?
- In light of the sermon, what's one way I can pray for you this week?
- What song did we sing, stir your affections for the Lord?
- How can I pray for you this week?

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The conversation doesn't have to be long; it just has to be intentional. As you ask questions and answer them, you put forth effort to care for others, and you open yourself to their care. You've had a meaningful conversation. You now know how you can pray for them. One of my pastor friends created a "3-2-1" principle for interactions after service. He greets three people. He asks questions to two people. He has an intentionally deep conversation with one person. He also prays for and follows up with the person he engaged deeply with. The principle is practical and replicable. If you adopt it, you will have initiated interactions with six different people each time you're in church. The level of conversations is like being at a swimming pool; you continually progress into deeper waters. This is an excellent method for overcoming loneliness. Just think how many people the Lord might use you to bless through this simple approach!

### ***Lunch After Service***

When service ends, there is one activity that everyone will engage in—eating lunch. People are usually hungry. Many of them have either made lunch plans or are about to. You, too, will eat lunch after service. In this area, avoiding isolation doesn't require a drastic shift in your schedule, but rather an expansion of company in your regular routine. Therefore, make it your goal to regularly enjoy lunch with others after service (Gen. 2:18). This is a beautiful way to practice hospitality in the Bible. These arrangements can vary. You can:

- Make a pot of soup or spaghetti and invite one to three people to your home.
- Invite people to your home and have a potluck.
- Invite people to your home and order a few boxes of pizza, and have everyone financially contribute.
- Invite people to your home and do BYOF (Bring your Own Food).
- Invite people to lunch with you.

If you invite people to join you for lunch at a restaurant, make sure the restaurant checks a few boxes. One such box is that the place is inexpensive. If the restaurant costs more, it will deter people from joining. The goal is to build and strengthen relationships in your church. The goal

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is to avoid isolation. Therefore, aim for the meal to be inexpensive. Another box to check is having a good environment. As you invite people to lunch, aim to eat at a place conducive to conversation. A loud environment is a conversation killer. However, if it's a suitable environment for conversations, you can have edifying discussions. At lunch, you can ask the questions mentioned above. You can also ask questions like:

- What's your story?
- How did the Lord save you by his grace?
- How did the Lord bring you to this church?
- Name three Christians who have had the most significant influence on your faith?
- What are three books that have had a profound impact on your faith?

As you ask and answer these questions, you're active in building Christian community. As this is a regular rhythm, you will find yourself being alone less and being with people more. As you do this with the same people, your friendships will blossom. A community forms over time as you consistently spend time with the same people. It brings you closer to others and helps in balancing solitude vs isolation biblically. So, make it a habit to eat lunch with others after service.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. How often have you approached Sundays with a self-centered mentality (Who will talk with me, etc.) as opposed to an other-centered mentality (who can I converse with, who can I encourage)?
2. How would a different mindset impact your actions and motives?
3. Which application from this article do you plan to apply?

# 3

## DISCIPLESHIP—DO LIFE TOGETHER

As you flee a life of isolation and flock to a life in community, it is vital to intentionally prioritize doing life with a few people. What oxygen does for the body is similar to what consistent and intentional time with a few people does for community. It is essential. Without oxygen, you're a corpse. Without consistent, intentional time with people, you're alone. Understanding the importance of community means recognizing that we are not designed for a solitary race. As stated, the church is God's answer to isolation. One way to have Christian community within the church is through discipling relationships.

During Christ's earthly ministry, his primary community was formed by his disciples (Mark 3:14). Jesus did life with them. He had them with him when he walked, taught, prayed, performed miracles, dined, and slept (Mark 4:1-5:43; Luke 11:1-4). He is our standard and example, providing the Trinity as a model for community in human form. Also, the apostle Paul always had people with him during his ministry (Acts 16:3-4, 20:4-5). So, in your quest for community, prioritize and pursue discipling relationships. Through discipleship, you will know a few people in a deep and meaningful way. These relationships will help you and them fight against sin and progress towards Christlikeness (Heb. 3:12-14; Phil. 1:25-26). Sanctification is both a personal endeavor and a community project (Phil. 3:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:22). We grow best in the knowledge of Christ and his love with one another (Eph. 3:17-29).

Discipleship is a life-on-life relationship aimed at helping one another grow in Christ. It's sharing the truth of the gospel and your life with others (1 Thess. 2:8-10). It's opening the Word and your schedule to someone else. This is a practical way of overcoming loneliness. It is far from comfortable

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and messier than you'd think because we're sinners intentionally spending time with sinners. Though it is a bit uncomfortable, over time it bears the fruit of strong, sweet relationships. Through them, you and they look more like Christ, which is God's goal (Rom. 8:28-29). Through discipling relationships, you will have what you need—true Christian fellowship.

### ***Who to Disciple***

Discipling relationships in the church are characterized by more mature members discipling more immature members (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:14-17). This normally means older people discipling younger people (Titus 2:1-8). The apostle Paul disciplined Timothy and Titus. He called them sons in the faith (1 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4). Therefore, as you survey the church, look for someone who is a more mature member of the same gender. This is often how to find godly friends as an adult who can sharpen you. Your pastors and leaders would love to help you in this search. Also, look for some members who are less mature in the faith for you to disciple. The next step is to take the initiative.

### ***Rhythms: Weekly***

Once you form a discipleship group, establish a habit of meeting weekly. The rhythm of weekly meetings sets the context for having good discipling relationships and building community in the Bible. What should take place during those meetings? I suggest you spend that time reading Scripture or a good Christian book, discussing applications, confessing sin, and praying. The bulk of the time should be spent around the Word because you want to build the community on Christ.

By God's grace, as you grow in Christ, you grow together (Eph. 4:15-16). This is the goal of discipleship. We mature in love and holiness through the knowledge of Christ (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 1:9-11; 2 Pet. 1:2-11). As you share and hear observations from Scripture, the Lord uses them to increase our love for him. As you pray together and for one another, the Lord increases your affections for one another. When you establish this weekly rhythm, you make it more challenging to live in isolation and easier to live in community. You have a weekly appointment to meet with a few people. Not only that, you will see them at least twice a week because of the Sunday gathering and your discipleship group. As you meet regularly and

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spend intentional time together, you will begin to form a community and experience the meaning of community in a tangible way.

### ***Transparency and Vulnerability***

A real community, one with depth, is a small group of people who really know one another. The group is transparent about its strengths, weaknesses, and struggles. The night of Jesus' crucifixion, he opened up to a few of his disciples (Mark 14:32-35). The apostle Paul exhorts the church to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:1-2). Your community can only bear your burdens if you share them out loud. All of us have struggles with particular abiding sins. When we look at loneliness in the Bible, we often see it coupled with the weight of carrying burdens alone.

All of us struggle with temptations to those specific sins (Jas. 1:13-15). All of us have certain fears. All of us are prone to discouragement in specific ways. If you're going to live in a real, honest community, you will have to open your heart and bear your soul before others. This is the path to overcoming the fear of vulnerability in community. The Lord uses this type of honesty to produce closeness. Transparency breeds more transparency. It's the airflow that allows vulnerability and intimacy to circulate within the group. You want to know your group and be known by them. This level of intimate knowledge knits your hearts together.

The reason for transparency and vulnerability is to grow in Christ. You do this to receive God's help through your discipleship group. By being transparent, your group learns specific ways they can pray for you, encourage you, and follow up with you. And you get to do it the same with them. Like I said, holiness and perseverance are a community project (Heb. 3:12-14; 12:14-17). This provides an answer to the question, "is isolation a sin or a season?"—it reveals that we are not meant to battle in the dark alone.

### ***Prioritize Time Together***

The weekly time together in the Word is an integral part of the discipling relationships. It plays a vital role in spiritual formation (John 17:17). However, discipleship is more than a weekly bible study. Jesus' disciples weren't just with him when he taught; they were with him all the time (Mark 3:14). Time together outside of regular Bible Study can be intimidating and

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provoke insecurities because we're sinners. We naturally want to cover our blemishes, conceal our weaknesses, and hide our sins. However, we don't invite people into our lives because we're perfect. Nor do we do it to perform and to please people. Love for them is the motivating factor.

Time is a precious commodity. It's non-refundable. It has a no-return policy. Therefore, the willingness to invite people into your life communicates genuine affections for them (1 Thess. 2:8). Genuine love is an essential ingredient for community and reflects the hospitality in the Bible. The prioritization of time together doesn't require a complete overhaul of your schedule. It just requires a willingness to open your schedule to others and find how to stop feeling lonely by integrating others into your daily life. It requires you to reflect on your rhythms and see what activities you can invite others to join you in. The activities and amount of time together can vary. You may spend a day together, a few hours, or 30 minutes. Regardless of the amount of time, each touch is valuable, as it contributes to the formation of a community. Each time you spend with them is an incremental investment in the relationship and another brick laid to build community.

What regular rhythms are on your schedule? If you like to exercise, you can invite people to join you for a workout. The time together in a gym or on a run provides an excellent context for in-depth conversations and the importance of social interaction. It's a way to encourage and support each other. The shared experience is a sweet memory made. The accumulation of those experiences creates the snowball effect that accelerates the formation of community and closeness. There are a number of activities you can invite your discipleship group to join you in:

- Dinner with your family
- Home project
- Service project
- Walks outside in the park
- Camping
- Hiking
- Weekend trip
- Grocery shopping
- Seeing a movie

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- Game night
- Watching a sports game
- Bonfire

Intentional time with the people you disciple or who disciple you will help you foster community and live out Bible verses about friendship. The more time you spend with them, the stronger your relationships will be. You will experience the joy of living in a sweet and encouraging community.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. Has this chapter changed, challenged, or confirmed your view of discipleship? If so, how?
2. Are you a part of a discipleship group? If so, have you opened up to the people in your group?
3. What rhythms can you invite your discipleship group to join you in?

## 4

# HOSPITALITY: OPEN YOUR HOME, OPEN YOUR HEART

The quest for community requires intentional time together. The more meaningful time spent together, the deeper the community will be. An essential way to avoid isolation and cultivate community is through hospitality. The meaning of community is best expressed when we open our lives to one another. The biblical definition of hospitality is the love of strangers; it means welcoming and receiving guests into your home.

God is hospitable. He lovingly created the world and welcomed us into his world (Gen. 1). He created Eden and brought Adam into his presence, where Adam walked with God (Gen. 2:15, 3:8). After Adam sinned, God exiled him from his presence (Gen. 3:24). God is holy, and man is sinful. Humans are born separated from God because of sin (Isa. 59:2). When we look at loneliness in the Bible, we see that it fundamentally stems from this separation. God has always planned to reconcile sinners to himself to bring them back into his presence.

In the Old Covenant, God made a gracious provision by allowing the High Priest to temporarily enter his presence to offer a sacrifice to atone for his sins and the sins of Israel (Lev. 16). This sacrificial work anticipated the work of Christ. Christ, the divine Son, became a man to reconcile sinners to God through his death and resurrection (1 Pet. 3:18). The exalted Christ is now in heaven preparing a place for us (John 14:2-3). Christ will return, and God will dwell with us in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1-5; 22:14). Given all this, it isn't a stretch to say God is the most hospitable! But here's the thing: the God who is most hospitable

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commands his people to resemble him through hospitality in the Bible towards one another (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). We open our homes to love, serve, and bless one another as has been done for us. This is the heart of Christian fellowship.

Hospitality is countercultural in our day. We live in times when people don't open their doors to others. Time together is usually spent away from the house. The home is commonly viewed as one's private sanctuary. Many want it to remain private. Yet, the gospel leads us to view our homes differently.<sup>[1]</sup> We lovingly welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us (Rom. 15:7). If we want to live in Christian community and have healthy relationships, we must commit ourselves to hospitality. As you open the doors of your home, you create opportunities for closeness. Intentional time together inside your home helps your community feel more like family.

### ***What Hospitality Doesn't Mean***

It is essential to clarify what hospitality doesn't mean. First off, hospitality doesn't mean you have to be an extrovert. People with outgoing personalities are not the only ones who should host. Scripture commands all Christians to be hospitable without grumbling, regardless of personality types (1 Pet. 4:9). If one is more introverted, hospitality may require more effort and energy. Still, the Lord's grace is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9-10). The Holy Spirit is the helper who is ready to help you (John 14) in overcoming social anxiety. Hospitality also doesn't mean you provide entertainment. When you host, you're not performing for your guests.

Hospitality isn't about you working to make them pleased and have a good time. Theaters, stadiums, and arenas provide entertainment, pleasure, and amusement. You don't show hospitality to entertain but to engage, love, and serve. This shifts the focus from performance to the importance of social interaction. Hospitality doesn't mean you have an extravagant house for people to see or provide the best meal for them to enjoy. Your home isn't an art gallery to display paintings, photos, decorations, and gadgets. Your home isn't a museum of your collections and trophies. Instead, your house is a hub for connection, engagement, encouragement, and refreshment. When you host, the meal doesn't have to be Michelin-starred! You don't have to provide a full-course meal or have a fantastic

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menu. You don't have to break the bank for your guests. Just make a pot of spaghetti or tacos! When showing hospitality, your goal isn't to knock your guests' socks off but build them up in the Lord according to Bible verses about community.

I have friends who have hosted Taco Tuesdays at their home for years. Tacos are inexpensive. They're not an extravagant item on the menu, yet it's what my friends provide. For them, Taco Tuesday started as a small group of friends enjoying a cheap meal, and it has grown into a weekly gathering for a large group. They have a rich community and sweet friendships, made possible by weekly tacos for people to enjoy. If you spoke with the guest, they would tell you that they don't attend for the tacos but for the people and the sweet time together. This is a practical example of how to find godly friends as an adult.

### ***What Hospitality Does Means***

Hospitality is welcoming guests into your home with the aim of blessing and serving them. Your goal is their encouragement. You want the Lord to use the time in your home to fill their cups and spur them on. Therefore, when you host, see it as an opportunity to edify them. The time together in your home strengthens your relationship and, thus, your community.

As you commit to being hospitable, you need to set a good, sustainable rhythm for yourself. Scripture doesn't say how often you should host. It doesn't mandate the frequency of your hospitality, only the heart posture for it (1 Pet. 4:9). Distance runners will tell you that a key to a good race is establishing a good pace. If you go out too fast and too hard, you will burn out. Maintaining a healthy community is not a sprint but a marathon. Hosting daily or three times a week may be unsustainable for you. I suggest starting slowly and building over time. This helps in balancing solitude vs isolation biblically. As you continually host, the bond of your community will grow not in days, but in months and years.

### ***Meaningful Conversations***

When hosting, you have the opportunity to set the agenda and facilitate conversations. You want the time to be meaningful and memorable. You should have a few questions that can lead to sweet conversations and

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help in overcoming the fear of vulnerability in community. Below is a list of questions you could ask:

- How did the Lord save you?
- What's something sweet in this season (a rose)?
- What's something hard in this season (a thorn)?
- What's something the Lord is teaching you (a bud)?
- What's your favorite Christian song (hymn, contemporary, gospel) (a scent)?
- What passage of Scripture has really ministered to you recently? Why?
- What are you reading in Scripture? How has it encouraged you?
- What aspect of God's character has most deeply ministered to you in this season?
- What aspect of God's character are you doubting this season? Why? What's a passage that can help you combat it?

As you facilitate conversations, aim to answer the questions you ask. You want them to know you as you open your heart. You want to share your sorrows and struggles and the sweet moments the Lord gives you. This is a vital part of overcoming loneliness. The more you open your heart, the more you provide opportunities for others to truly know you, which allows you to have community. The richness of the community will develop as you commit yourself to hosting people and opening your heart to them.

Reflecting on Bible verses about friendship, we see that a friend loves at all times. By inviting people in, you are practicing the very community in the Bible that sustains the soul. Even when you feel like you are struggling with Bible verses about loneliness, remember that God sets the solitary in families.

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. How has this chapter influenced your view on hospitality?
2. How does God's hospitality towards you in Christ motivate you to be hospitable towards others?
3. Who can you invite to your home next week? What questions can you ask to facilitate meaningful conversations?

# 5

## PLAY THE LONG GAME

A real, meaningful, enriching community doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and intentionality. If community is a meal, it's not cooked in a microwave but in a crockpot. Crockpot meals take hours to cook. They require patience. In the same way, a real community takes time to form and enjoy. It requires effort and patience. It involves self-denial and a diligent pursuit of others (Luke 9:23-24; Phil. 2:3-5). A lifestyle of avoiding isolation and living in Christian community is a commitment to playing the long game. What does this look like?

### *Perspective*

If you're going to live and remain in community, you must maintain a proper perspective. One thing to keep in mind is that your community will be small. God created you to be a finite creature with limited capacity, knowledge, and time. It is impossible to know and be known by everyone. You can be a mile wide and an inch deep, but you won't have real Christian fellowship. Or you can adopt a less-is-more mentality. You know a few people, but you know them deeply. You can prioritize intentionally encouraging a small group of people while also praying for other church members (Heb. 3:12-14). The more you know a few people, the more you can provide them with specific care and encouragement. This is the true meaning of community.

### *Prayer*

A rich community is a great prayer request to pray for consistently. This is a prayer that God would love to answer because he made you for a relationship with Himself and his people. He brought you into his family. He wants his comfort and love to be mediated through his people to you

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(John 13:34-35; 2 Cor. 1:3-7). Jesus commanded prayer and promised favorable answers if the requests are aligned with his will (Matt. 7:7-11; John 14:13-14). A life lived in community with church members certainly aligns with the Lord's will. Therefore, it is good to devote yourself to persistent prayer for community and look for Bible verses about community to fuel those prayers. Your prayers for it demonstrate your dependence on God.

Whenever the Lord provides you with rich community, it's good to keep praying for it. You need the Lord to grow it. Prayerlessness about the community can cause it to shrivel up like a dead plant. However, persistent prayer for it can result in its flourishing. Pray for the relationships to deepen and grow sweeter. Pray that the community would be committed to living out the one another passages found in the New Testament (John 13:34-35; Gal. 6:1-2, 1 Thess. 4:18). This is essential for overcoming loneliness. Prayer is an effective and necessary tool for lasting community. .

### ***Presence***

Community, by its definition, requires in-person relationships. It's the only way one can have an actual community. Time spent together is a primary way in which a community is formed and strengthened. The effort to avoid isolation entails the commitment to being with others. If someone is a part of your community, they show up for you and vice versa. If you want to have a strong, lasting community, commit yourself to the ministry of presence (Prov. 17:17). Scripture encourages Christians to live this way (Rom. 12:15).

The ministry of presence blesses people more than you think. It demonstrates compassion and care. The ministry of presence was the only action we can commend in Job's friends (Job 2:11-13). In a digital age, physical presence screams love and commitment with a loud megaphone. Scripture teaches there is a time for everything (Ecc. 3:1-8). As you prioritize being present in both good and bad times, you strengthen the closeness of your relationships. What should you show up for? Make it your goal to be present for your community when:

- One gets a promotion.
- One loses their job.

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- A relationship ends.
- Someone gets engaged.
- There is a wedding
- There is a funeral
- One gets a diagnosis
- One has a successful surgery
- One miscarries
- One's child is born
- One's parents divorce
- A pipe bursts in their home
- One buys a new home

As you seek community as a lifeline for your life, strive to love your neighbor as yourself by being community for others (Gal. 5:14). This is the importance of social interaction. As you continually show up to share in their grief and joy, your community will feel like the spiritual family you are in Christ. The more you show up for others, the more you will avoid isolation. The more you show up for others, the more you will live in community in the Bible. The more you show up for others, the more they will feel loved by you. The more you show up for others, the richer and sweeter your relationship will be. You want to live in community, not just for a season, but for a lifetime. Your commitment to being present with others will certainly help you fulfill that goal and answer the question of how to stop feeling lonely.

### ***Patience***

Community doesn't happen overnight. Nor can you rush the process of forming it. It usually doesn't happen on the timeline we unconsciously set. Instead, it develops over time through intentional interactions and time together. One key phrase is "over time." This requires patience, the ability to wait and forbear without complaining or quitting. The Lord is patient with his people (Ex. 34:6-7). He calls his people to resemble that patience

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towards others (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 3:12-14; 1 Thess. 5:14). Love is patient (1 Cor. 13:4). If you're going to live in community, you need patience.

You will need to be patient in the pursuit of community. You may not hit it off immediately. Not every interaction will be pleasant or a home run. Not every conversation will be easy. There may be awkward moments. It may take you some time to open up to others. It may take them time to open up to you. This is part of overcoming the fear of vulnerability in community. You may be the primary initiator for time together for a season. Yet every interaction and shared experience is a step toward building community.

You will need patience for living in community. You will identify quirks in others you don't like. There will be challenging moments. You will give and receive admonishments and rebukes (Prov. 27:5-6). You will be sinned against, where you will need to forgive (Luke 17:3-4). You will sin and need to seek forgiveness from others. The Lord will use your community to make you more like himself (Phil. 1:6).

### ***Perseverance***

Pursuing and maintaining community requires endurance and perseverance. You will get tired. There will likely be times when you're tempted to throw in the towel. This calls for perseverance. The apostle Paul said, "Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up" (Gal. 6:9). This is a life verse to cling to as you strive to live in community and find how to find godly friends as an adult. When you persevere in your pursuit of others, you will eventually enjoy the sweet fruit of your labor.

Perseverance is also required for maintaining the community. You want it to deepen. You want the closeness to grow. You want to encourage the people you do life with (Heb. 3:12-14). You want to continue to prioritize time with them, especially as life gets busy. It will take even more intentionality. This happens through perseverance. A well-tended garden is beautiful, a pleasant sight to the eyes. The soil looks good. The plants appear healthy and trimmed. The weeds are plucked. This isn't the fruit of laziness. This isn't the fruit of passivity. This isn't the fruit of doing the bare minimum. It's the result of hard work. It's the result of intentional care. It's the result of persistence in tending to the garden. Your community can

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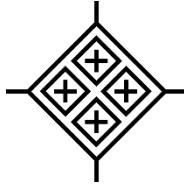
flourish through perseverance. As you continually call, encourage, host, pursue, and serve them, you not only live in community but also actively contribute to its blossoming. This is the importance of community in action.

In your effort to live in a healthy community, keep Paul's exhortation before you, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

A healthy community is something worth pursuing. Though it takes time to grow, you can experience an enriched and encouraging life with others. As you play the long game, do so with the vision of eternal glory in view. Through the gospel, God in Christ has made you a citizen of his kingdom, a member of his covenant community, and a child in his family (Eph. 2:11-22). This is the ultimate fulfillment of what does the Bible say about community. Therefore, you will live in community with the redeemed in the presence of God for eternity (Rev. 21:1-5; 22:3-5). May that future reality continually shape and motivate your pursuit of community in this life..

### ***Reflection Questions:***

1. Which of the five Ps resonates with you the most?
2. How is your prayer life for community?
3. How are you doing with being present for people in your community?



# CONCLUSION

You may have lived in isolation for some time and assumed it would remain that way. Yet, God created you for something different. God created you for something better. God in Christ saved you into something far better and sweeter than isolation—a relationship with him and his people. He has effectively called you into his body, the church (1 Cor. 12:12-14). He wants you to experience life in fellowship with him and his people.

May the gospel lead you to take the initiative and pursue others (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:1-11). May Christ's love motivate you to be community for others. May God's purposes for man in creation and redemption compel you to avoid isolation and live in community.



THE  
MENTORING  
PROJECT

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