



**Creating
community**
Devotional

**Wycliffe
Bible
Translators**

Creating community

Try to imagine your life without the people you have interacted with, formed connections with or just lived next door to over the years. Some days we might argue that life would be a little easier without all these people, but for the most part life would be a whole lot duller.

God didn't create this world with just one person in mind, but all of us. He has given us the wonderful gift of community. What community means looks different to each of us, and is always changing as we go through different seasons of life or move from place to place. What we do know, though, is that community is something that we all need.

Right from the very first days of creation, **The Lord God said, 'It is not good for man to be alone.'**

– **Genesis 2:18a**

Looking at the world through the eyes of different people and cultures brings fresh ideas and perspectives. Each session in this devotional will explore the meaning of the word 'community' in different languages and in different parts of the Bible.

Through this we hope to unpack what it means in our own lives and how we can be part of creating authentic, life-giving community.



Day 1

**Woven-together community
Koinonia**

Woven-together community – Koinonia

We added the final key to the intricate door, a cog whirred, and then before we knew it the light was streaming in and we had escaped! With four minutes left on the clock too!

Escape rooms have become an increasingly popular group activity. As a team, you are locked in a room with a timer counting down, with the only escape being through a series of interlinking challenges. My work team decided this would be a great activity to do together.

As we attempted to escape our plummeting rocket (Can you guess ours was a space-themed room?) we quickly realised that we needed to combine all our brain power and skills. Each of us brought something different to the challenge and together we were able to escape – not just one of us but all of us.

***Can you imagine trying to escape on your own?
Most of us would struggle.***

Woven-together community – Koinonia

In the great tapestry of creation, God has not made us all the same, but given us each a different thread to add. And, like thread, we are stronger when we are woven together. This is how our communities should look too.

If we take ourselves back to the time of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, we see people from all strata of society and all different places coming together to rebuild what had been lost. They worked shoulder to shoulder, and what happened? They finished in just 52 days.

This is a perfect expression of a word which appears in the original Greek of the New Testament: *koinonia*.

It means a fellowship of people uniting together with a shared sense of purpose.

So often in our communities and churches, we can be nervous when someone a little different comes in or intimidated by a person who seems to know so much more. We forget that God made us all different for a reason, and united us in faith and hope in Christ.

Within *koinonia*, diversity is instead a reason for celebration.

How can we celebrate our diversity in our communities rather than hide away from it?

The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors with their bolts and bars in place. Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah – Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meroth – places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. – Nehemiah 3:6–8

Challenge

Next time you are in church, ask someone who speaks a different language to share a prayer with you in their language or ask one of your leaders if you can try singing in a different language one Sunday.

Pray

Thank you, Father, for the wonderful diversity you have gifted us with across the world. Today help me to see the world through your eyes and reach out to people from all different cultures, backgrounds and languages.



A group of about ten people are sitting in a circle on white plastic chairs around a brick fireplace. The fireplace has a fire burning in it, and the room is dimly lit, primarily by the fire and some ambient light from a window in the background. The people are dressed in casual winter clothing and are holding white coffee cups. They appear to be engaged in a conversation. The background shows bookshelves filled with books, suggesting a library or a community center setting.

Day 2

**Lived-out community
Gezellig**

Lived-out community – Gezellig

The rains poured down, lashing our faces, making our backpacks heavier with every step. The days of walking and few hours of sleep were pressing down on us as we attempted to find our way, and our supplies were dwindling.

Not the story of an epic adventure, but 14-year-old me out walking with friends across fields just a few miles from my house.

Skip to just a few hours later, a familiar door is opened by the hero I call Mum, who sweeps me up in her arms, not bothered by how mud-spattered and soggy I am. Before I know it, my heavy pack is taken from my back, and I am in clean, dry clothes, relaying tales of my adventures around the dinner table. I am home. This is a feeling the Dutch would call *gezellig* – a vital part of community.

This word is often translated as ‘cosy’, but not the kind of cosy that comes from simply curling up on the sofa but a cosiness built through human connection. It’s that cup of tea on the sofa with a friend talking through old times.

Gezellig describes that feeling which comes from feeling at home among people we love, trust and are experiencing life with. It’s the lived-out experience of community.

Lived-out community – Gezellig

We see this lived out in the Bible. When the life of Jesus' mother, Mary, was turned upside down by the news she was to carry the son of God, we see a beautiful moment when she visits Elizabeth, who is also carrying a child. Together they share joy through months of change.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. – Luke 1:41

This kind of connection takes time though. We need to create space for trust to build and genuinely care for one another, even if this might lead to difficult conversations.

If we look at our own church communities, are they a safe place for people to share life together? Do we feel at home when we walk into church?

We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God's Good News but our own lives, too – 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NLT)

Challenge

Pray for opportunities to connect with people at your church, in your workplace, or in your neighbourhood who might be isolated.

Pray

Thank you, Lord, that you stand with us in the ups and downs of life, and we can bring all things to you. We pray that we would use your example and care deeply for one another, demonstrating your love to those around us.





Day 3

An unseen community

An unseen community – _____

The aromas of a feast wafted through the air and presents were waiting to be exchanged. Songs had been sung and the story of Jesus' birth had been shared.

This scene will be familiar for most of us and instantly make us think of Christmas. But for the small gathering of Bydla* Christians, it was a new experience. Not an experience which would be splashed across social media later for all to see, but one done behind tightly closed doors.

For Bydla Christians, faith cannot be shared openly together and celebrations like this one risk persecution. Across the world, millions of Christians face this reality and meeting as a church is nearly impossible.

That's why today's word for community is _____. You might be confused, but for many, even revealing the language can be too dangerous. It is in these places that we are reminded of perhaps the most important part of community.

Taking away the walls of the church building or the ability to meet doesn't have to be the end of church community.

*name changed for security reasons

An unseen community – _____

Even from behind prison bars, Paul shared in fellowship with other Christians, like those in Colossae:

For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

– Colossians 2:5–7

Even when we are physically disconnected, fellowship and community remains as we stand in Christ together. When everything else is stripped away, we are reminded where our true identity lies and what should be at the heart of our communities.

We need to remember that we are part of a worldwide Church and, like Paul, stand in spirit with those who are persecuted. We can pray, encourage and rejoice with our brothers and sisters around the world.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

– Ephesians 2:21

Challenge

Find a way to connect with someone who is cut off from church – perhaps write a letter to them or pray for them.

Pray

Father, today we lift up our brothers and sisters across the world who are persecuted for their beliefs. We pray you would protect and comfort them. Thank you that although we may be separated physically we are united in Christ.



A group of four children, three girls and one boy, are smiling and posing for a photo. They are in a large, brightly lit room with a blue ceiling. The child on the far left is a girl with dark hair, wearing a pink cardigan over a red and white striped shirt. The second child from the left is a girl with braided hair, wearing a dark patterned top. The boy in the center is wearing a blue t-shirt with a graphic that says "Wild Wings" and "FLY HIGH". The girl on the far right is wearing a plaid shirt and has a blue bag strap over her shoulder. In the background, other children and a white structure are visible.

Day 4

**A connected community
Gemeinschaft**

A connected community – Gemeinschaft

Join a club; everyone's part of a club.' This advice was given to a friend who was preparing to move to Germany.

It's a wise piece of advice; every week more than 600,000 clubs take place in Germany, covering everything from baking to beard growing. Clubs are firmly embedded in the social fabric of Germany and the number continues to grow.

But what is it that brings people back week after week?

If we transport ourselves to the 19th century and introduce ourselves to the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, we might be able to understand more. Tönnies divided up the world into two social realities – *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gessellschaft* (society). At the heart of *Gemeinschaft*, people feel part of a collective which allows relationships to grow organically and a shared dependency on one another emerges. In a *Gessellschaft* existence, relationships are set by rigid legal structures and actions are driven by our own individual needs.

A connected community – Gemeinschaft

Gemeinschaft is something that we are all drawn to and something that those 600,000 clubs provide for so many people. We know too that, right from the very beginning, God called us not to be alone, but to work as one.

In our last session, we explored the idea that as Christians we are bound by something much stronger than a shared passion for baking or beard growing – Christ. What’s more, in Christ there are no outsiders, no one not quite

good enough at that sport or not quite the right status; everyone is welcome.

All of us are made in the glorious image of God, and our communities need to be places where we recognise that everyone has their own unique role to play and where everyone is welcome.

Think back to the first time you were in a club. How did it make you feel? How can we make people feel welcome in our churches?

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.
– 1 Corinthians 12:12–14

Challenge

Invite that new person in your church or office for a coffee (perhaps via Zoom or Skype), or write them an encouraging card with your favourite Bible verse.

Pray

Lord, we thank you that there is nothing which can separate us from your love. We are sorry for the times when we push people out of our communities. Today grant us the wisdom to recognise the unique roles everyone has to play and how we can use these to glorify you.



Day 5

***A crisis-hit community
Obong zikakkong***

A crisis-hit community – Obong zikakkong

It is easy to despair as we see pandemonium erupting across the world as Covid-19 spreads and weaves itself into all areas of our lives. As with so many crises before it though, a much more powerful C-word has slowly been appearing: connection.

When was the last time you checked in on that lonely neighbour? When was the last time you talked to someone in the supermarket queue? When was the last time you had space in your schedule for a (virtual) cuppa with that old set of school friends?

Physically we are disconnected, but in reality we are becoming more connected than ever before.

This might be a new experience for many, but if you were to transport yourself to an area in the heart of Chad, this might not seem so unfamiliar.

A crisis-hit community – Obong zikakkong

For the Bidiyo people of Chad, *obong zikakkong* is the expression for community and translates as ‘hold on to each other’. This mindset permeates all areas of life. When one celebrates, all celebrate; when one grieves, all grieve; when one needs help, all help.

Now transport yourself to a familiar scene in the Bible.

Four friends hold on together to the edge of a mat as they carry their paralysed friend to the feet of Jesus.

Together they share in the suffering, but where does this lead them? Directly to the feet of Jesus. Through holding those around us, we too can bring them to the feet of Jesus so they can see his love.

Right now, as we all face the same giant, we understand how important it is to hold one another, but how can we make sure that this lasts beyond a crisis?

Today, what can you commit to continuing when Covid-19 becomes a distant memory?

Some men came, bringing to him a paralysed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralysed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ – Mark 2:3–5

Challenge

Connect with a local charity and find out how you can help practically, or pray for someone on your street who you know is in need.

Pray

Thank you, Lord, that you work all things for good and that through the chaos of Covid-19 we see communities coming together. We pray that we would seek you in all situations and be your hands and feet to a world in need.



Wycliffe Bible Translators

info@wycliffe.org.uk | 0300 303 1111 | wycliffe.org.uk

©2020 Wycliffe UK Ltd

A charity registered in England and Wales (251233) and in Scotland (SC039140).
Company Number 819788.

All Bible quotations are from the New International Version unless stated otherwise.