Susan attended a holiday club run by her local food bank. The clubs provide food, fun activities, and learning opportunities, helping to relieve the pressures that many families face outside of term-time.

For Susan though, it brought a sense of community that she’d been longing for. “I’ve been able to have adult conversations so it’s been a really nice break and a change from usually staying indoors,” she explained.

“The activities have been really useful for me and the kids. I’ve been interacting with the children more than I do at home with them, so it’s made us bond together as well.”

The truth is, we all long for community – a sense of belonging and being supported and known by others - but many people today in the UK don’t have it. In fact, in 2018 the Prime Minister appointed a Minister for Loneliness for the first time, such were the saddening reports of people suffering isolation, lacking friendship and community.

Jesus knew all about being alone – and he understood the importance of community. In fact, he demonstrated this when he selected twelve men to be his disciples.

These men ate together, worked together, served together, and undoubtedly had fun together. There were some tough times, arguments, and personality clashes, but this pattern of community was a great example of how to do life well. This continued in the Early Church (Acts 2), when the Bible says that the believers went from house to house and worshipped together.

Jesus connected with people from all walks of life, often by eating together with them. He was frequently to be found spending time with people that others looked down on or ignored.

We too have the opportunity to live in this way – to welcome and include people who feel left out or lonely - simply by opening up our lives and homes to others. And as we grow in relationships with others, we can grow in our relationship with God and our understanding of ourselves too.
Let’s reflect on some key Bible verses about community. Take a few moments of quiet as we ponder God’s Word and ask God to guide us and speak to us through our time together.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

**1 Peter 3:8**

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.”

**Psalm 133:1**

“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people dwell together in unity.”

You could light a candle or play some gentle worship music in the background. This could aid your reflective time in God’s presence.

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Discuss

1. When or where have you experienced the strongest sense of community? Share your experiences of positive community.

2. Have you ever felt excluded from a community? How did that make you feel? What (if anything) could have helped you feel more included?

3. The Bible tells us not to give up on meeting together. How has gathering with other Christians helped shape your life and faith?

4. Thinking about what you know about Jesus’ life and ministry, is there a story that sticks out for you about how he built— or enjoyed— community with people? What is it about that story that seems special to you?

5. What can you do to make people feel welcome when their life experience or culture is different from yours? How can we make sure our church is a place where people feel welcome just as they are?

TIP

You could split your group into smaller groups if that dynamic would work best. Perhaps appoint a spokesperson in each group to report back to the larger group for feedback afterwards.

TIP

Sometimes praying out loud can be awkward. Depending on your group’s preferences, you could ask everyone to write down their prayer needs on post-it notes and then the group could collectively pray for everyone’s needs and suggestions.

PRAY

We are going to close today’s session with a time of prayer.

This is an opportunity to pray that God would unite your community and people feeling lonely or neglected would find comfort, friendship and support. Pray that God would help your group to be sensitive to the needs of people who might be feeling isolated or excluded from community.

Pray for courage and boldness to include people, and for opportunities to build new relationships and deepen existing ones.

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