



# REAL COMMUNITY

**in a digital world**

God calls us to biblical community.  
But what does that mean for a teen who'd rather be plugged in?  
And what does it mean for you as their parent?

BY LESLIE HUDSON



If you've been in church life for long, you've seen names change to make different aspects of church sound less formal: Sunday school became small group, the sanctuary was called the worship center, and even the fellowship hall changed to something like the Faith Family room.

The term *community* was known by different words throughout previous generations: fellowship, family of God, even *koinonia*. But it all had the same idea: a group of people who love and seek God, choosing to be together regularly.

Doing life together. Sharing life. That's community.

On the surface, community sounds like something you think teenagers would like: spending time with their friends, enjoying relaxed time, and (hopefully!) food.

But too many parents say, "My kids don't want to hang out with their friends; they find all their social interaction on their phones." That may seem like the truth, but loving parents understand the importance of face-to-face peer groups as well as the faith-building benefit of having a strong Christian community around them. And though social media can be used for building up faith, sharing prayer requests, and connecting with other believers, it doesn't take the place of in-person, genuine, interpersonal relationships.

Of course, that may be truth, but speaking truth to a teenager does not mean they will act on it. (Can I get an amen?) So what can loving parents do to guide their teens into genuine Christian community? First, make community part of your life. Like practically every other aspect of raising teens, they pay much more attention to what we do rather than what we say.

Then, start to invest in the communities found in the different corners of your life:

- ⊙ **YOUR FAMILY.** This seems so simple, but many households do not actually have community within themselves. Time as a whole family may seem scarce, but be intentional with the time you have: meals, travel to and from activities, and even in the midst of extracurriculars.
- ⊙ **YOUR FRIENDSHIPS.** Teenagers are not the only age group who benefit from healthy, edifying friendships. You need friends too, mom and dad. Pursue friendships with people who love God and follow Him wholeheartedly.
- ⊙ **YOUR CHURCH LIFE.** If you see church as a "check it off the list" type of activity, your teens will adopt the same attitude. Choose to stop treating church

as an obligation; rather, consider it a way to bless and be blessed by fellow believers. Know your talents and blessings are used by your church body, and theirs for you.

⊙ **YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD.** Waving "hi" to the neighbors might be friendly, but that's hardly the example of living in community. Choose to be a part of your neighbors' lives by inviting them over, hosting neighborhood activities, and helping when they need a hand.

⊙ **YOUR PASSION.** What is it that tugs at your heart? Is it hungry kids, abused women, struggling parents, lonely seniors, or something else? Wherever God leads you to serve or minister, join others in sharing the love of Jesus, whether inside or outside the church.

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## COMMUNITY HAPPENS AS PART OF LIFE, SO THERE'S NO NEED TO TRY TO SEPARATE IT.

Once you've demonstrated community-minded faith, consider some of these steps in helping your teens do the same:

### 1. DECLARE CERTAIN ELECTRONIC-FREE ZONES.

Maybe it's a block of time (family dinners) or a room (their bedrooms) or an event (Wednesday night youth group). Yes, devices may keep us updated and entertained, but they do not engage us in community.

### 2. DEMONSTRATE DIFFERENT WAYS TO INTERACT.

Teens don't always cherish the benefit of sitting with a hot cup of coffee and getting caught up on each other's lives. (That's for us, moms!) They also may not want to stand around and talk at a cookout like Dad. But they can engage others in playing board games, ultimate Frisbee, going for hikes, and more.

### 3. INTEGRATE COMMUNITY INTO WHAT THEY'RE ALREADY DOING.

Community happens as part of life, so there's no need to try to separate it. Challenge your teen to be intentional about relationships with believers as well as those who may not know Jesus. Help them find ways to love and serve every person God places in their lives.

**4. INTRODUCE THEM TO MENTORS.** There is immense value in multi-generational relationships. Share how you've been discipled through believers who were a little further down the road of life and encourage your teen to find someone to mentor them.

Community may seem like a buzzword, but it's as biblical and solid as the first church. God made us to thrive in community, and He will bless us when we make it part of our faith.

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## HOW DID YOUR PARENTS HELP YOU FIND COMMUNITY?

**//** *My parents encouraged me to be a part of Christian community by consistently taking me to church before I was old enough to drive myself. Throughout the years, they have also allowed me to serve alongside them as they taught Sunday school. I enjoy helping people and serving alongside them; it taught me that community is a group of people I come to be poured into, but also a place where I can pour into others. This made me more likely to participate as people were counting on me. They also modeled the importance of Christian community not just by regularly attending church, but by actively investing in people and being invested in.* **EMILY, 19**

**//** *My parents always said Christ has to be the center of my life and that it's encouraging to be in community because they can keep you accountable and be there to pray for you. They stressed the importance of it when most of the people my age were not in church, and they can see how hard it is for those people to find community especially when life gets hard. I wanted people around me to encourage me in my walk.* **SAMANTHA, 19**