

Week 4 (6/7/20): Building the Village: community and connection

Sam moderate

- Intro Panelists:
 - Katie: homeschooler for 3 years, also work part time
 - Heather: 6th grade teacher and mom to 2nd grader and kindergartener
 - Jessica: 10+ yr homeschool vet & health/wellness/life coach
 - Lily: Work PT, mom to 4 (2 teens and 2 young adults)

We've all heard it a thousand times, the word: Unprecedented. Between the stay-at-home orders, quarantine mandates, and face-mask requirements, and social unrest... no one has experienced anything quite like this before.

We have seen different institutions around the world: governments, businesses, and the local church all close. But almost immediately, something incredible started happening. Sunday morning worship became entirely virtual. meetings were transformed into online gatherings via Zoom, Google hangouts, and other video call platforms. People found ways to celebrate birthdays, childbirths, graduations, and overall life.

Why? Because we were created for community, to share life with others. The coronavirus can't stop that. The people make up a church, not the building. So during this time, more than ever, we need to surround ourselves with support. We just need to be a little creative that's all.

Definition of Community: a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

Q: How has your own need for community shifted during this pandemic? What was it like pre-COVID and what is it like now? How have you intentionally and creatively sought after community during this COVID pandemic?

Heather: Pre-COVID, I felt like I had pretty solid community at work, at church, and with friends outside both of those areas. I didn't think much about seeking community because it was there. But once the pandemic got worse and SIP was in full effect, seeking community became a need. At work, my coworkers and I have been so used to seeing each other everyday and needed to connect. We needed to talk about school, students, what they were doing with their classes, and what's going on with their families. Our community group at church began meeting every week instead of every other week. We decided to take a pause with a study and just take the time to check in

and pray with each other. With my friends outside of work and church, we set up regular weekly or biweekly hangouts online. What's been nice is that we talk a lot more now than before the pandemic. In terms of being creative, with one group of girlfriends, we meet for Mask Monday, where we do our skin care regimen together every Monday night while checking in with each other...that way we remember to do our once a week facial, too! Also recently, we have met up with other friends to take a walk or a bike ride (with masks on) or hang out in one of our driveways to eat and chat together.

Jessica: To be honest, we are a pretty introverted family. With that said, before Covid, I was so much more of the "teacher" and "soccer mom" mode. Community was OUTSIDE the house. With Covid, it's no longer about entertaining or keeping the kids on task, it was actually seeing each other as our MAIN community. Of course, we need to see our friends, and that happens more in social media. But, there's been a great sense of closeness as a family and us loving each other.

Lily: Community groups has always been a high priority for me and my family. We have led various CG for the last 18 years at NN & CPC days. And when I think about my faith journey over the last 30 years, I have always been a part of a small group. It is important to share life and have accountability to one another, to know others and be known. During COVID-19 the desire to BE with my friends and community has only solidified that priority. It has been sweet and soul filling to find creative ways to connect with my inner circle: tailgate, zoom calls, walks, dropping sweet treats to share over zoom call together. Though, not ideal, the effort is what has really meant a lot to me. Alternatively it would be easy to just fade off and isolate. It takes intentionality to BE a part of a community, it takes showing up not just for yourself but to believe that showing up is just as important for the other person, we have a responsibility to lift others up. If anything, I like to think that I will look back and remember all the crazy creative ways we chose to gather together and I bet no one will forget either.

We have all heard the quote: It takes a village to raise a child. This is an African proverb that means that an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment. The villagers look out for the children.

Q: What do you think about this proverb and how is it reflected in your family? In how you raise your children?

Jessica: Yes. It does take a village. The main, important lessons are taught and caught at home, but the way the village supports those lessons builds the foundation. That is why homeschooling in community is imperative. Having solid friendships with families that share your family's beliefs are important. Also, having mentor moms with older kids who have come through a similar system is also important. Like Katie says, the people who are included in your village are so important, and we want to have families that have

the same core beliefs, but a different way of expressing those beliefs. That's how we become much more well rounded, our kids and ourselves.

Heather: It's totally true...it takes a major village. There is no cutout for what a village should look like...all villages look different. The way I see what a village is, is other people in your life that have a relationship with you and your kids...whether that's grandparents, aunts/uncles, cousins, and friends...it's the people who you trust and depend on. They support, love, and care about you and your family. We are blessed to have both of our families in the Bay Area...both our parents and our siblings. I can count on my village to pray for my kids, to help care for their needs, and to guide them in the right direction. The times that my family have watched my kids for an extended period of time, they've fed my kids physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Life lessons, Bible stories, safety and wellness tips, and sharing fun times have all been a part of how my village has helped raise my kids alongside me and Newt. A village isn't just about helping raise our kids but also living life together with other villagers...spurring each other on in life. Our friends and our church family are villagers in the same village with us. They have lived life with us before we had our kids, through our ups and downs, keeping us in prayer, listening to our struggles, checking in with us, and challenging and encouraging us.

Katie: (I still remember that there was a big controversy in conservative Christian circles over this, but I was too young at the time to pay much attention--political? To me it seems, if not a necessity, at least descriptive of something good) When we've been in settings where we've had great community, it's been a big blessing in our lives. I'm a far better parent for watching other people's parenting over extended periods of time. My kids, I hope, are the better for learning to trust other adults and seeing other ways of doing things. Having a village takes off a lot of stress off parents--you have help, you have people you can rely on in an emergency, you have people who care. Plus, having good friends just brings a lot of joy :) I would say though--the people in your "village" make a big difference--I have intentionally distanced myself from some of my naturally formed villages.

Q: If you do not have family nearby or don't have immediate family support, how do you create community for your children?

Lily: Even though both families are local, we did not have a built in network to rely on. Varying circumstances: Inlaws moved away, I'm the youngest of 4 and by the time I had kids my sisters were at different stages in their lives. I had to work through loss, feelings of envy, jealousy and bitterness and get to a place of creating community for my family. I had to get past the uncomfortable feeling, and reach out to others. Deal with my pride, and ask for help (even if that meant I couldn't reciprocate) Ex: friends who cared for my kids so I could go on doctor appts. Help pickup my kids after school etc... My neighbor has become Auntie

Lorraine. By doing so, it has given my kids the richness of community that comes from individuals that intentionally pour into them not just because they are related to them.

Katie: I'll be honest, this has been the hardest part of relocating to the Bay Area, hands down. In other places we've lived, it's been relatively easy to build relationships with other families, either through church or through intensely shared life circumstances (ex: dorm life, expat life)--although I wouldn't have called it easy at the time. Here it's been much harder (people are already overcommitted, church is huge, we haven't had good spaces to invite others into), and much of it came down to persisting in meeting up with complete strangers, even to the extent of prioritizing that over, say, school work. Some of them have slowly become friends. We were committing to be more deliberate about church relationships and then the pandemic hit ...

Jessica: Even though I have family nearby, I prefer not to have them look after my children. One side are not believers and I am concerned about what they would allow in a variety of instances. The other side are SUPER lenient... and I'm sure the kids really would get away with murder. Seriously. So, I've had to be intentional about creating friendships with other mothers with kids who are the same age range and have the same core values. As homeschoolers, the intentionality is paramount because there is not natural grouping as a school setting would do. But in this time of pandemic, all the normal ways of finding that group are all but eliminated. So if one is to try to find community now, I am not sure how one would do it...my best guess is to go to Facebook groups and search for a local community and see what happens.

Q: A lot of what is required currently: Shelter in place, social distancing, masks, closed parks and the rest all seems contradictory to connection and community. How have your children adjusted or not adjusted well to this? What questions have they been asking?

Heather: They've been doing pretty well. They asked a lot of questions in the beginning of SIP like, "Why do we have to stay home? Why can't we go to the park? Why can't we see our friends? Why is everyone wearing masks?" ...but now they are used to walking around oncoming walkers, seeing people wear masks and wearing masks themselves, and they enjoy staying at home. We try to go out twice a day...once in the morning for PE during school time and once before dinner, usually a walk or bike ride in the neighborhood. They still miss their friends at school, their extracurricular activities, and giving hugs. :)

Jessica: Other than not being with their friends, they are fine. We've had great conversations about the logic and the effectiveness of all the measures. The cost and effect of SIP as well as what they think the future holds. For sure, we are longing for the day for person to person gatherings and park days... and I don't think we'll change that part.

Katie: Overall, they've done great. They've gone through a lot of big transitions, but it's prepared them really well to be flexible and to depend on family as the constant. They really want to know when they can see friends and do things again. I think questions will get harder as we start to open up- as with all parenting choices, flat nos are easier to understand

Q: How have you kept your children socially connected? Through Zoom? What if your child is not a fan of Zoom or too young? Have you come up with creative ways for them to experience socialization safely?

Jessica: For the very young children (7 and under), they really don't need much other than their family. It's around 8 and up when they want to be with their friends more often. That's how my kids have been from an early age... and it seems to hold true in the homeschooling family because the kids have their own siblings to play with all day long really. So, the friendships are built in... until they get older and the hormones start delineating a maturity difference. My oldest have been going on walks with his good friend since his family is not ok with hanging out inside... so learning to take what we can get. But this has been the hardest part: the teens needing social connection outside of the family and not being able to do that. The connection through Zoom/games does not take the place of seeing each other and hanging out. We are still working this out. But for other kids, their families as well as our own are good with having a kid swap, so that's what we've done recently. We've all asked about our physical distancing practices to make sure it's something acceptable to each family, and there's a lot of grace and understanding going around.

Sam: Talk about what NN Kids are doing each week Offer any suggestions

Heather: My kids zoom with their class 2-3 times a week and with their cousins once a week...each meeting for about 30 minutes (that's all they can really handle). Sometimes during school time, they'll write a card or draw a picture to send to someone. More recently, we've had a few weekend hangouts with either the cousins or with one particular family (while wearing masks).

Katie: (SAM- this answer is totally skippable!) We have not done a very good job of this. Yes to Zoom and other types of messaging/video/calling. But only consistently with 1 other family. We've had to accept that what kids do is primarily "play" together, not talk. My oldest writes letters and emails, and has built some community through online classes. Occasional doorstep dropoffs. To families whose kids are too young - I think this question came from the mom of a 2-year-old? At 2, my kids at least held social relationships very loosely, and I wouldn't worry much about socialization outside the family. They need strong attachment to their primary caregiver (you!) and will rebuild quickly what they forgot. By 4, there has been deep-seated grief over leaving friends

behind from at least 1 child, but at 2, their world still revolves around their parents. (To answer the last part, we haven't, really.)