

CUSTOM CREATIONS

Elementary
Week 5

TEACHER DEVOTIONAL: Community

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

I was serving in kids' ministry the first time I realized that community (and people) were an important part of following God. I was a volunteer leading kids through a small group and the discussion questions were all about how God made us to have friends, and how important it is to make friends. Each kid and volunteer took home a puzzle piece from the small group as a reminder of the importance of friendship, people, and self-value. I was just out of high school and found myself in a season where I wasn't really friends with the people from high school. But I also hadn't found a new group to hang out with. I was depressed and chose isolation and the devil loved that. But I got a kick in the butt when I realized the hypocrisy of my choice to lead a small group of kids, encouraging them to value friendship while I was running away from that truth. So, I finally signed up for a small group. It's been seven years now and two of the people in my small group have become two of the most important people in my life.

They are there when life is hard and I need to let out some stress. They are there when it feels like things are falling apart. They are there for fun, and they are there to help me learn and grow. Since I found these friends, we have all taken turns encouraging, pushing, and being there for each other. I have been able to see God's goodness shine through them in ways I never would have found—if it weren't for a God-centered community.

Perhaps you're like me and you've found a community that helps you grow closer to God. Have you ever thought about writing them a letter? One of the most helpful things I have found in intentional friendships is my friends' recognition of the good they see in me. The "gold" that shines that I can lose sight of—but comes from God. And one way I like to remind my friends of their "gold" is by writing them a letter occasionally, to tell them.

The epistles (Paul's letters in the NT) are truly one of my favorite parts of the Bible. I read them and I think to myself: *"How incredible is it to think that Paul was writing these letters to his friends?"* Paul wrote to these churches and communities that he loved. So, he did his best to encourage and push them towards Jesus. One lens we can see these books of the Bible through is a template for intentional friendship. How special would it be if you got a letter from a friend, out of the blue, reminding you that you are being prayed for, you are loved, and there is gold in you—along with all the hard stuff you're trying to grow in?

Try to take time this week and write a letter to a person in your community, that you see gold in.

If you don't feel like you have a community that can push you to Jesus, pray and consider trying to find one to be a part of.