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humans like more than to talk about themselves and share their opinions.) A survey can be on anything from the top thing they're grateful for to the best kind of climbing tree to their favorite Indian food recipe to the worst name ever for a pet goldfish to an encouraging Bible verse.

While it's not solely up to you to keep your community together during this crisis, you can play an important role. Encourage others to connect. Check in on people you know—especially extroverts who live alone. These weeks of isolation are very difficult for those of us who are more social in normal times.

I want to reiterate Hebrews 10:24-25 here: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together ... but encouraging one another" (NIV).

We are urged in the Bible to be good stewards of community, and that doesn't have to stop when the option to be together physically does. In fact, it is more crucial in those moments than at any other time. Galatians 6:2 says, "Carry each other's burdens" (NIV). Certainly we all already had our own burdens, but COVID-19 threw us a curveball made of illness and death.

Consider, too, that many within our communities have lost income, health care, and even employment. These individuals and families may not be able to join efforts for traditional community—whether through lack of access or lack of spirit—so we must be sure to reach out personally, too.

Together, we'll get through this. Together, with God—the best community-creator ever. And one thing's for sure: When we can finally meet together in person as a church family again, it will be a mini foretaste of heaven. When we all get together, *what a day of rejoicing that will be.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Becky St. Clair is a freelance writer living in the Bay Area with her husband and three young children. She's an avid reader with a passion for storytelling, the ocean, Thai curry, rainy days, writing actual letters, and travel, which she unfortunately does rarely. In her free time, Becky enjoys playing percussion with the Pacific Union College Symphonic Winds Ensemble, exploring the California coast, and discovering San Francisco.

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The STEWPOT

A POTPOURRI OF PRACTICAL IDEAS to help you become a better steward

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MUTUALLY ENCOURAGED: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

Never before in our lifetimes has community been as important as it is today. During the past 10 years, naysayers have been claiming that technology, specifically social media, makes today's younger generation incapable of having in-person social interactions and maintaining real relationships. But now we are living in a world where technology is the only way to maintain relationships and engage socially.

With my newfound freedom in the evenings—no ballet, no mentorship meetings, no evening work shifts for my husband, no book club—I find myself excited to finally have time to invite people over. Until I realize that's not possible.

While at the store for necessities, I consistently realized I was much closer to fellow shoppers than the (at the time) recommended six feet of social distancing. I am so used to simply saying, "Excuse me!" and reaching across another shopper's view to grab a brick of cheese or a box of crackers or a can of beans.

Now, instead of my extroverted self looking for ways to engage socially with people whose company I enjoy, I find myself contemplating the ways in which my daily



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STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.



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interactions with people are either altered or eliminated.

This is a whole new world—a world in which we desperately need community with others to remind ourselves we’re not alone, a world in which that community’s standard ways of connecting are mostly or entirely removed, a world in which we must be creative in order to maintain that community.

Fortunately, this is 2020 not 1918, and we now have tools at our disposal which allow us to stay in touch in real time, rather than waiting weeks between letters. Today, our most basic methods of communication are telephone and texting, and the most advanced allow us to enjoy real-time video storytime with an astronaut floating 220 miles above the surface of the earth. (Yes, that’s really a thing. Google it.)

Actually, I misspoke there. The most advanced technology at our disposal is the human brain. And it desires and requires community—a characteristic hard-wired into humans at creation.

Hebrews 10:25 urges us as believers not to give up meeting together, but to encourage one another. In Romans 1:11-12, Paul writes that he is eager to reconnect personally with the church in Rome, that they would be “mutually encouraged by each other’s faith” (NIV). Perhaps most apropos for our current situation is 1 Thessalonians 5:14, which says we are to “be patient with everyone” (NIV). After I’ve spent weeks in the same house with the same people, this speaks directly to me!

Many Scriptures indicate that unity as the body of Christ is crucial. (See Romans 12:4-5, Psalm 133:1, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Colossians 3:14, and Ephesians 4:3 for a start). While this concept can be applied in many ways, my focus here is on uniting as a community to support and encourage one another—even in a time of crisis such as we find ourselves today.

How can we do this? I’m sure you can brainstorm your own creative ideas, but here is some inspiration from others to get you started.

- Join with several friends on a conference call, and put them on “speaker” in your living room. Grab some snacks and enjoy a chat.
- Alternatively, pick a book and have read-aloud sessions with several friends on a conference call. Discuss. This can work for devotionals, novels, Bible study, memoirs—whatever your group enjoys!
- Play board games over FaceTime. Sorry is a great one, as are Battleship, Candy Land, Guess Who?, Apples to Apples, Scattergories, Taboo, Charades, Trivial Pursuit, Mad Gab, and so many others. (Note: Dutch Blitz is a no-go in this situation, sorry!)
- If you have a particularly visual hobby or skill, consider presenting beginner classes and demos on Facebook Live. Someone I know did this while she made muffins. (The downside is that only the person doing the FB Live gets to eat the result!)
- Start a group blog. Create a simple blog and give access to whomever would like to contribute. You can share thoughts, dreams, worries, stories, poems, songs, photos, or whatever, and then comment on what others post. The blog will be a permanent record of what you were all thinking and discussing during this time in history.
- Host regular Zoom vespers or worship. The free version of Zoom allows for only 40 minutes for groups over two, so plan accordingly!
- Ask different people to read bedtime stories to your kids over FaceTime or Google Hangouts. If you have a loved one who is uncomfortable chatting, this approach gives them a purpose and a focus.
- Have your kids do YouTube Live storytimes for other kids.
- Host a hymn sing. Post song titles ahead of time, and then go live playing and singing. You won’t be able to hear the others, but they can tune in and sing/play wherever they are, and they can comment on your broadcast in real time.
- Start a book club. Both kids and adults really enjoy reading and discussing a book with friends.
- Write your own book—with friends. Open a Google Doc and grant access to your group. You can work together in real time or on your own to craft a fun and unique story.
- Host a live prayer meeting. YouTube Live, Facebook Live, Zoom, Google Hangouts—any of these will work to get a few people together virtually to pray.
- Post surveys on social media. (There’s nothing



Activities - during this time - can include playing board games over FaceTime, baking muffins over Facebook Live, or joining an online hymn sing-a-long.