

SUB TOPIC THEME:
Community: The Anti-Alone

Lesson Objective:

The purpose of this small group session is to help students understand what a good community looks like and to help build one. We each have been dealt a different hand in life, and we want to make peace with and accept it as one of the gifts God has given each of us.



Set Up Info: Two Parts

Supplies Needed:

1. No equipment needed for this session. Make sure to read through and reflect on the whole session before meeting the students.
2. Make sure to make copies of the Student Response sheet at least the day before.
3. Grab Bibles for the group so they can participate in the Scripture readings.
4. A heart for students and listening ears. Be quick to listen and slow to speak.

Instructive Prep:

Your students have spent a lot of time thinking about moving, dreading it, being excited, hurting over saying good-bye to friends, packing, actually moving, unpacking and dreading being the new kid...again. It's a tough deal then to have to try to make friends all over again; it's hard, it takes a lot of energy and it's scary. The question is, how can you, as a leader, help make this transition easier for them now and in the future? The hand they have been dealt is a tough one to hold, especially today; but the reality is, this is their life and there are a lot of good things that go with being involved in the military community. How can you help them make peace with it and learn how to be proactive, but still true to themselves?

This session is designed to help students realize that although this is where God has put them, he has not left them. We hope that this session will help students move a step closer to making peace with their military life and embracing it. What they have is a gift from God; we want to help them accept it and teach them how to build the kind of community God desires for them. A big job, and a job you can help guide them on.

The progression of these studies is four-fold: learn, feel, do and what next. The goal is for students to learn something new, connect at an emotional level, and participate in doing something during the study. Finally, the "what next" focuses on a change in

attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, the movement is toward spiritual and emotional transformation in kid's lives, so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together! Have fun and lead well.

Introduction:

Community can be tough, especially when your PCSing every few years, but it doesn't have to be as hard as we make it sometimes. Think about the communities you are a part of now; family, friends, classmates, sports, theater, Club Beyond, other activities you participate in... As a military kid you also get to be a part of the larger military community. Maybe that is hard for you, maybe you wish your parents had made different career choices, but the fact of the matter is, you are sitting here right now and you haven't been given a choice. While sometimes it may be hard, it's also a blessing. Most likely you have been able to see more of the world than other students your age and most likely you have had the chance to make more friends than most students. This is your life for now. What are you going to do with it? While military is a given for now, you do have a choice in the smaller communities you choose to be a part of. My hope is that you make peace with the hand you have been dealt if you have not already; and my hope is that, even though you do PCS a lot, you can still be a part of good community.

Sometimes finding a good community to connect with can be hard, but when we look in Scripture, God gives us some good things to look for, reminders. When we keep these things in mind, things begin to get a little easier. Remember, God designed us for community! (See Genesis chapter 2) When he tells us what to look for, and we follow that, things usually turn out pretty well. I'm not saying it's easy; new community is hard, learning to open up and trust others...again, it's tough, but hopefully when we do that, we get to enter into a fun and encouraging community—one that God desires for us.

Introduction Story:

When I think about community, two different communities I have been a part of come to mind right away. One of them was not so life giving, but the other changed my entire view of life, God and myself for the better. This is why God talks about community in Scripture because he knows just how much community can hurt us, or help us grow as a person and grow closer to him.

The not so good first was in middle school. Let's say 8th grade. Small church, my best friend who also went to my church had recently moved to another state and I was now alone with a youth group that wanted nothing to do with me. It's strange really how teens can randomly single out a person or a few people. It wasn't like I had this problem anywhere else, only church. Weird, right?

I remember being at church one day when a woman my Mom's age started talking about forming a dance team at our church. It would be small at first. They would just do one dance and see if any interest formed after that. I was SO excited when I found out. I

had always wanted to dance and now I would get the chance to learn from one of the best dancers in our church! When all was said and done, I and three other girls got picked to do the first dance. We practiced hard for three weeks. I wanted to be my best; and when that Sunday finally came, I could not get to the church fast enough. I remember sitting in the front pew with the other girls, my hands trembling I was so nervous. Finally, the offering came and the four of us went up. The music started, my breath caught in my throat. One-two-three-four... what was the first move! I glanced over my shoulder, right!

I finished the dance without another mistake. My smile was ear to ear. I don't remember the rest of the service, I was too excited, I couldn't wait to talk to my parents about it and see what the other kids in the youth group thought.

When the service let out, I casually went over to the bathroom in the back hallway while the youth group hung out after service. The teasing started as soon as I got there. I was heartbroken. I couldn't get home fast enough. My parents didn't understand why I was so upset when I did so well, and I ran to my room as soon as I got home. I should have expected this; the youth group always found a way to make fun of me. I had just hoped that this would have been different. It never was.

Being a part of that community was tough because it wasn't a good one. The students were more into cutting each other down, experimenting with drugs and the opposite sex. They had all the God answers but didn't live anything out. It was confusing. I experienced a lot of hurt in that community, but while I was there I also decided that the way I was treated was wrong and that I would work hard to make sure I was better than that.

When my family switched churches, I got the chance to enter into a new community. I was unsure at first, but I sensed something different right away. I just couldn't quite put my finger on what.

In this new group I began making friends that were really different. These people not only read God's word, but tried to live it out. They looked out for one another, challenged one another, called each other out on their mistakes in love. We learned to have a lot of fun hanging out during the week and at youth group. It was strange. There was a group of leaders who were deeply committed to helping each of us grow and calling out leadership potential in each of us. Every student that was willing was given a different responsibility to help the group run smoothly, and we talked in large and small groups about how we could be better as a group.

At this point in my life I was wrestling with some tough things. I knew I was loved by God and others, but the embarrassment and shame from the last youth group I was a part of still followed me. I was skeptical of leaders, shallow with friends; and while I looked to include the outsider, I still was unsure of myself.

The following year there was signups for a mission trip. At this point I had made good friends and had developed a good mentoring relationship with one of the female leaders, but I was still guarded.

The application to go on the mission trip was long and I almost didn't fill it out, but in the end I did. Following the application there was an interview and then we would find out who could go and who would stay home. I was nervous. I knew my mentor was one of the leaders helping with the decision, but I wasn't sure if that was in my favor or

not. When I finally got the call, I had convinced myself I was not going to be accepted. I was so sure, in fact, I almost didn't hear her tell me I had been accepted on the team!

I didn't know it yet, but God would do some amazing things while I was away on the mission trip for two weeks with this new community. While I was there, God did serious heart surgery. His presence among this community was stronger than I had ever felt and in those two short weeks God shined a lot of light on the lies I believed about myself, taught me that I could trust people, showed me that people did love me for who I was and that God had incredible plans for my future, plans I could not even begin to fathom. Five years later I still can't believe the things that I have been able to do, but it started with that community believing in me, strengthening me and showing me their love.

This is why I believe community is so important! The people we surround ourselves with radically shape our way of thinking about the world, God and ourselves. When surrounded by hurtful people, I struggled in many areas; but when surrounded by loving people, I was able to allow others close to me. A loving community is not enough; it is still up to us to let others in, but a loving community helps us to trust and to grow. The question is, how do we recognize that community when we find ourselves in another new place?

Introduction Questions:

1. What are some different communities you have faced (been in)? Were they good or bad?
2. Looking back, what would you have done differently when facing a bad community?

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. When you think about communities you have been a part of, what made them good, bad or indifferent?
2. How do you feel about being a part of the military community? How can you/have you come to terms with this bigger community you are a part of?
3. Think back to different communities. How have they affected the way you think and act?
4. What can you do to make the community you are a part of better and stronger?
5. Can you think of any Scripture off hand that talks about community?

Central Bible Passages:

When we look at these next three passages we see a few themes emerge. The first passage talks about being happy with the lot God has dealt you. Maybe for you being a part of the military community is hard. In Ecclesiastes we see that our circumstance, no matter how different it may be from anyone else's, is a unique gift from God. It may be difficult sometimes, but if we surrender to God, he will take us and shape us into the

young men and women he desires for us to be. Many times that transformation happens in good community. In the next few passages we get a snapshot of what a good community looks like, specifically by looking at the early church and the way the believers lived life. If we read beyond the passage given, we see not only the way that they lived, but the positive things that flowed out of their obedience to God. Check it out!

Ecclesiastes 5:13-20

13 Here is a terrible thing that I have seen in this world: people save up their money for a time when they may need it, 14 and then lose it all in some bad deal and end up with nothing left to pass on to their children. 15 We leave this world just as we entered it—with nothing. In spite of all our work there is nothing we can take with us. 16 It isn't right! We go just as we came. We labor, trying to catch the wind, and what do we get? 17 We get to live our lives in darkness and grief, worried, angry, and sick. 18 Here is what I have found out: the best thing we can do is eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for during the short life that God has given us; this is our fate. 19 If God gives us wealth and property and lets us enjoy them, we should be grateful and enjoy what we have worked for. It is a gift from God. 20 Since God has allowed us to be happy, we will not worry too much about how short life is.

Acts 2:42-47

42 They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers. 43 Many miracles and wonders were being done through the apostles, and everyone was filled with awe. 44 All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. 45 They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. 46 Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, 47 praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.

Acts 4:32-35

32 The group of believers was one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they all shared with one another everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God poured rich blessings on them all. 34 There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned fields or houses would sell them, bring the money received from the

sale, 35 and turn it over to the apostles; and the money was distributed according to the needs of the people.

Life Application:

1. Thinking about the two Acts passages, how was the early church the same or different from the community you are a part of today? What did you think about those passages?
2. Think about the different communities you are a part of. We are all a part of numerous communities—your family, school friends, Club Beyond, sports, other afterschool activities...How can you change your community to look more like the Acts church? Think who, what, when, where, why, how? Accountability? Is there someone who would catch the vision with you? Write it out and pray over it, then act.
3. Sometimes the situations we are born into are hard to understand. If you struggle with some of the military life, start thinking more about it. Talk about it with a trusted friend and begin to pray that God would slowly change your heart. Maybe you will never choose this lifestyle as an adult, but you can make peace with it now and enjoy the communities you find yourself in.

STUDENT RESPONSES:

1. When you think about communities you have been a part of, what made them good, bad or indifferent? How did they affect you and how you act?

2. How do you feel about being a part of the military community? How can you/have you come to terms with this bigger community you are a part of?

3. Thinking about the two Acts passages, how was the early church the same or different from the community you are a part of today? What did you think about those passages?

4. Think about the different communities you are a part of. How can you change your community to look more like the Acts church? Think
 - What?
 - When?
 - Where?
 - Why?
 - How?
 - Accountability?
 - PIC? [Partner in Crime]

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