

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY IN THE PANDEMIC

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First off I would like to say that this year, 2020, has been nothing we could have ever imagined in our lifetime and I pray your family is doing well during these difficult times. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Shelter in Place which closed a vast majority of public places are just a few of the many things that have transpired. Despite all that, ***Christ has still been present through and through.*** While not being able to gather in public places, it has allowed us to connect to our friends and our families in a variety of ways; *social media has proven that no matter where you are, no matter your situation there will always be a way to be connected.*

Some ways I've stayed connected to my friends during these times have been through video games. With school being moved to online and just having more free time, my friend group found video games as an outlet for our extreme boredom. We play a variety of games such as: Minecraft, APEX Legends, Fall Guys, Among Us and our most consistent game Valorant.

Over the last couple of months, there have been so many trials and tribulations my friends and I have had to go through. I cannot speak for them, but for me personally during this quarantine I have struggled with my mental health. All these unwanted thoughts, insecurities, stress have all factored into that. Despite that, we all still find time to play games and enjoy each other's presence regardless of our circumstances. For me personally, being able to stay connected and interact has helped me adjust to the circumstance we are all facing this year. ***They give me a sense of security and hope because whatever may happen throughout the day or week, my friends are going to be there for me regardless. God truly has been revealing himself through these experiences.***

A big way my family has become even more connected during these times has been through prayer. My dad has made it a point that we as a family should pray every night together since we would all be home and from the beginning of the quarantine until today, we have accomplished this whenever possible. There would be some nights where we are too caught up in our activities, we would come home from work later than expected, etc. God has really shown through our efforts how much closer our family can be. I can say that I have not felt closer to my family than I have through these times. If there is any takeaway I would want you to take from this is, to really **take care of yourself especially your mental health.** Everyone handles things differently so just be understanding and do not be afraid to reach out. The last takeaway is to really make a point to have a consistent prayer time. Whether you do that with your family, friends or even by yourself I cannot emphasize how much of a positive impact this will have in your life.

