

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Family Matters
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Community

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18

Every time a new school year comes around and Baylor students come back to Waco, I get nostalgic. I get nostalgic for my time at Baylor because I loved my time at Baylor University. While I loved a lot of things about Baylor, my absolute favorite thing about my time at Baylor was the guys that I got to live with. There were eight of us and we lived together for three years in a row – sophomore, junior, and senior year. And I loved living with them for two of those three years. Because by the time senior year rolled around, I was just ready to move out. These guys just did things that drove me nuts. Whenever you live closely with someone you realize that they do things that are annoying, frustrating, or just make you angry.

Here are some examples. I had one guy that I lived with – one of my closest friends in the world – he is the cheapest person I have ever met in my life. It was not because of his situation – he was fine. He is just super, super cheap. So here is what he would do – every single day for lunch he would pack it into this plastic baggie. He would pack a sandwich into a plastic baggie and put it in his backpack. Then on Friday, he would pull them all out and wash them and lay them out on our counter to dry all weekend and then reuse them all next week. It drove me crazy!

Then another guy, five of us shared a bathroom. This is a problem – five college guys sharing a bathroom is disgusting. We should have burned it down after we moved out. The five of us shared this bathroom which meant there were a lot of soap and shampoo bottles in the shower. After a while I started realizing, man my shampoo is running out fast. I do not have that much hair and I do not know what the deal is – I do not use that much shampoo. So, I just started doing math in the shower one day. So, there is one shampoo bottle, two, three, four...one of our roommates had just alternated between all of our different shampoo bottles. For three years he didn't buy one. There were four sets in there even though there were five of us using it. It drove me crazy!

Another guy, he just would sing all the time. From the moment he woke up – it is not pop songs, it is not Christian songs, it is not worship songs. What he would do was make songs while he was studying to memorize things he was learning and trying to memorize. So, he would sing songs about supply chain management. It drove me crazy!

Another guy, we had this list of chores and this guy, on his list of chores, was to buy dishwashing soap for our dishwasher. So, he went and bought pods and we would put them in the dishwasher. This was great until a few months went by and we kept grabbing the pods from

under the sink and putting them in the dishwasher. And someone realized that it was not dishwashing pods, it was laundry detergents. He bought Tide pods! We were eating Tide pods before it was cool.

Another guy was nocturnal! This is the guy that I shared a room with. He would stay awake all night watching movies and playing video games and he would sleep during the day. I could not even go in my room during the day!

Another guy, he would send the most passive aggressive texts about leaving out dirty dishes on the counter. But he was the worst at it!

Here is what I learned about living with eight guys for three years. People are great, until you have to spend a bunch of time with them. You are great! I can hang out with you. I can be with you on Sunday mornings. But if I have to live my life with you, you are going to do something that is going to drive me crazy! Which is a problem. Because here at Harris Creek, as we are continuing our sermon series called Family Matters. We are talking about things that matter to this church family. One of our core values as a church is being community centered. We are big believers in Life Groups here. Small groups of people who get together and do life with one another. Now, that is a problem for me because I really enjoy my life. I really am so grateful for my life. I have a great life, a great job, a great child, a great marriage, and I don't want other people's problems ruining my life. Why would I sign up for your crazy? My life is doing just fine.

During my time in ministry, I am serious, this is how I think about things. During my time in ministry, I have seen so many people have to care for other people's problems. They get in Life Group and their life is fine and then they have to care for other people's junk – like this. Affairs, anxiety, alcoholism, doubts about God, lack of a desire for God, eating disorders, depression, pornography, gambling addictions, lying. Problems with parents, problems with in-laws, problems with kids, problems with their spouse, problems with finances. Joblessness. They have a job, but they don't like their job. Gossip, greed, cynicism. I could go on and on and on and on. Why would I invite that into my life?

I think many of us don't. Many of us avoid community and draw back in isolation because we figure the problems of isolation surely are not as bad as the problems of community. It is just not true. While community is problematic, the problems in community are far less than the problems in isolation. Because in this country we had an isolation epidemic before Covid-19 happened. We had a loneliness problem developing in our country before Covid. But then Covid happened, and we had to pull back from our communities. We had to pull back from church. We had to pull back from our work. Many people, right now, in our country can go an entire week without having a conversation with someone face-to-face who actually knows and loves them and cares for them.

We are seeing the fruit of that right now. Right here in Waco I heard from a family doctor in town, who does not even specialize in this, but he is getting 15-20 calls a day about depression. Right here in Waco. And right here in Waco, if you want to see a counselor or psychiatrists or

psychologists many places have a 3-6 month wait. You see the problems of isolation are far greater than the problems of community. We are seeing it play out.

So, we are called to be in community, not just because community is better it is also Biblical. That is what we are going to look at today. What does it mean to do biblical community well? We are going to be in 1 Thessalonians 5. If you have your Bibles, open up there. 1 Thessalonians 5 as we talk about and examine what does it mean to do biblical community well?

Some set-up for you on 1 Thessalonians is actually probably the first letter that Paul wrote in the New Testament. It was written in about 51 A.D., and it was written about 2-3 years after the church in Thessalonica was birthed. These were baby believers. They needed to grow in their maturity. So, what Paul does all throughout this letter – if you have read it before – you might notice that time and time again Paul keeps saying Jesus is coming back! Jesus is coming back! Jesus is coming back! Jesus is coming back, and we have got to be ready for Him! In fact, the theme verse that really summarizes 1 Thessalonians is 5:2 – Paul says this, “...for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” Jesus is coming back. We do not know when, but we know that He is. If Jesus is coming back, we need to do all that we possibly can to be ready for Him.

This is where the role of community comes in. As believers in Jesus, community is not the goal. Community is not the goal. What community is, is it is a tool. Community is a tool to make sure that each and every one of us is ready for the day of Jesus Christ – either if we go to be with Him or when He comes to be with us. We need to be ready. One of the ways we do that is through community.

As Paul is finishing up this letter to the church in Thessalonica, he finalizes with this. Towards the very end of his letter, he gives them outlines on how to live in community with one another. We are going to see three ingredients how to live biblically in community with one another. So, we will be in chapter 5, verse 14 – “**And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**” Now what you have to know here is he is not writing to the church leaders. He is not writing to the pastors or to the spiritually mature. He is writing to everyone. He is using inclusive language – brothers and sisters – all of you – the entire church in Thessalonica. Your job is to “**...warn the disruptive, encourage the disheartened, and help the weak.**” All of us have a job to do because biblical community – the first ingredient is – biblical community identifies needs.

1. Biblical Community Identifies Needs

I was reading a commentary on this passage, on this verse. One of the commentators says it is like Paul is calling on a church in Thessalonica to act and think like doctors. That they are to know that everyone in their church community is sick with sin. They have been diagnosed with sin and as you think like a doctor you need to look around and think how I can make them more healthy. What does this person need? What medicine does this person need? Maybe this person needs more of a challenge to grow in their health? Maybe this person needs some encouragement to grow in their health? As you get together as a church your job is not to think, ‘Hey I am here

to fix people.’ It is to say, “I am here to help people. What can I do to help everyone follow Jesus?” It is a beautiful thing when the entire church is in on this.

But many times, many times in Life Groups this is not what it looks like. Because over my time in ministry I have gotten to see literally hundreds of Life Groups. I have examined hundreds of Life Groups here at Harris Creek and really in those hundreds of Life Groups there are only three types of Life Groups. Here is the bad news – two of those three types of groups stink. People don’t enjoy them. In fact, if I had you raise your hands...if I said, “Who here has had a tough time in community here?” I would bet a decent amount of people would raise their hands – because two of those three types of groups are just not very enjoyable.

The first group is this – the starving group. In this group everyone has signed up for Life Group hoping to be fed spiritually. They have signed up in this group hoping other people in their group would feed them spiritually. That everyone else in their group would help them grow in their love for Jesus. Now that sounds okay, but it is not. Because in practicality when everyone shows up hoping everyone else will help them, no one helps each other. They are looking to be fed spiritually, but no one has anything to offer. So, what this group looks like is a bunch of hungry people, but no one has any food to offer. No one is willing to cook. They show up starving and leave starving because no one brought any spiritual food to the table. It is not an enjoyable Life Group experience.

The second Life Group experience is - the exhausted group. What that looks like is that there are a small handful of people – two maybe three people – who really take ownership of feeding the group spiritually. They are pursuing Jesus every single day and they show up to group ready to serve. They show up to group with spiritual food to offer. And this happens week after week after week. They are feeding everybody else, but they are never fed themselves. So, what happens is they bail out of exhaustion.

Those are the two groups that do not work – what is the group that does work? The group that does work is - the biblical group. The group that looks like an old school Baptist church. The potluck groups. It is the group where everybody is bringing something to the group. Everybody is bringing spiritual food. You have been pursuing Jesus every day this week and you show up ready to provide something. Now some weeks it is going to feel like you have a lot to provide and some weeks it will feel like you have hardly anything at all. That is okay. What matters is that you are there ready to actively engage and actively be involved. That is what Paul is calling this church in Thessalonica to do. To be the type of community where it is not just the few leading the many, it is the type of community where everybody is involved. Everybody is meeting needs. Everybody brings something to the table. And when everyone is actively involved meeting needs and identifying needs, they are to do these few things.

So, let’s look at them. What does Paul call us to do as we are actively meeting needs in our Life Group? He says this at the beginning of the verse, “...**brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive,**” That word disruptive here in the Greek it is actually a military term. It means a soldier who is actively and on purpose broken ranks. A soldier who is actively and on purpose marching out of step from the group – that is what he is talking about here. So, picture this...you are on a team of Navy SEALs. You are overseas somewhere dangerous, and you have

been called to march from one end of the city to the next – that is your job. You are going from one end of the city to the next. You are marching together as a team. Until you realize that someone in your group has wandered off. He has gone sightseeing. What would you do? If you were a part of the Navy SEALs and someone in your group wandered off from group, what would you do? You would do all you can to go out and bring him back. Why is that? Because isolation brings danger. There is an enemy around you who wants to kill you and if someone deviates from safety, deviates from the group, deviates from their protection they are going to be killed. So, if you are on mission together you are going to do all you can to bring them back in because this is a life and death decision.

Here is our problem! Many of us are willing to let your brothers and sisters deviate from protection, deviate from the plan, be idle and disruptive from their faith because we are afraid of calling them out. We are uncomfortable with it. And we are more nervous about what they will think of us if we say something than what might happen to them if we do not. Do you hear that? That is important! We are more nervous about what people in this room will think of us if we say something, compared to what might happen if we don't. If you loved them, you would say something. Because as believers in Jesus, this is what we believe about this world. We believe that there is an enemy who wants to steal, kill, and destroy from us. Scripture says that he is like a roaring lion seeking to devour anyone he can. He wants to get his paws on all of us. So, the moment we see someone being idle and disruptive in their faith, breaking ranks and not pursuing Jesus, what we have to do is go out and bring them back. Warn them! Because it is the most loving thing, we can possibly do. Even if it makes us uncomfortable or we do not know the words to say. It is the most loving thing you can do. Because these are life and death decisions.

Likely, whenever I talk about someone who is idle and disruptive in their faith you probably have someone in your group that comes to mind. My question is, “have you told them”? You do not have to be harsh; you do not have to be mean, you can just say, “Hey because I love you here is what I am seeing. I want to keep you safe.” Because if we are in community with one another all of us need to be identifying needs – including the needs of warning people that they are in danger.

That is not all we are called to do. Paul switches tone with the second half of this verse. He says this in the second half of this verse, “...**encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**” Now it is a different tone because this is two different situations: two different scenarios. The first one is someone who is disruptive in their faith, but the next one who is disheartened. There is a difference between someone who is disruptive and someone who is disheartened. The person who is disheartened is someone who genuinely wants to follow Jesus, they do. But for whatever reason in this season they are struggling, they are having a hard time. Maybe they have been caught up in sin or they have been caught up in emotions that do not draw them closer to Jesus.

What the person who is disheartened needs is not what the person who is disruptive needs. Because the person who is disheartened does not need a lecture, they do not need to be challenged. They need to be comforted. And this is honestly where I struggle – I do not do a very good job of this. Because I have been in seminary and gotten my Master of Divinity. I can tell you about the Greek and the Hebrew. I can tell you about the book of Ezekiel. I have all the

answers for you. So, when someone comes to me and says, “Hey. I am struggling and I am having a hard time.” My first reaction is to say, “Ok. Do this, this, this, this, and this and get over it.” That is kind of my heart’s postures. In fact, there have been at least two times that I can remember where my wife and I have left Life Group. We have gotten in the car and Adalee has looked at me and said, “Nate, you just were not very kind.” I am like, “Adalee! It is because they need to be challenged! They have got to step up and do something in their faith.” And she is like, “No. I do not think they need to be challenged. I think they just need to be cared for.”

And here is what I am learning in this season, do not underestimate the power of empathy. Do not underestimate the power of empathy to heal someone’s walk with Jesus. This is what Paul is calling us to do. And is not sympathy, it is empathy – there is a difference. Sympathy means I feel badly FOR you. Empathy means I am going to feel badly WITH you, and I am going to do all I can to serve and love you in this season. And in those few times of my life where I have been able to access my emotions and feel empathy for people, I do not know really what to do. I want to help. I want to do something, but I just do not know what to do. So, what I end up doing is nothing. What I have learned from JP, he does a great job of this, he says whenever you don’t know what to do just do something. It does not have to be perfect. You do not have to say something profound, just do something. Send a text. Make the meal. Spend time with them in prayer. Spend time in prayer alone for them. In other words, do what this verse is telling you to do. “...**encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**” And move towards them with empathy.

So, as we are identifying and meeting needs, we are called to do two things. We are called to challenge people in our group and to care for people in our group. Many times, groups tend to go one way or another. You are either really good at challenging one another or you are really good at caring for one another. Maybe this week it would be helpful to get together and talk about where we need to grow. Do we need to grow in our challenge of each other or our care for each other? Because as believer in Jesus we are called to do both. Because point number one – a biblical community identifies needs.

Let’s continue on in this passage and see what else Paul has to say about doing community biblically. He says this in verse 15, “**Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.**” Now that sounds easy, it sounds clear, but it is actually a lot harder than that. Because many groups here do not look like that, because if we were to peel back the curtain and see what goes on in your group it probably looks like the opposite of the second half of that verse. Because after the comma, it says, “... **but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.**” If I had to guess, a lot of groups sounds like the opposite. They sound like this, ‘but they always strive to do what is good for themselves’. They show up to group whenever they have time for it. They serve each other whenever there is space in their schedule. They pray for each other whenever they feel like it. Rather than doing everything they possibly can to help each other, they do whatever they can to help themselves. And it is a shame because it is the opposite of biblical community.

2. Biblical Community is Selfless

I do not know about you and your family and your marriage, but for whatever reason my wife and I tend to have a disproportionate amount of arguments while on vacation. Because with vacation, there is so much expectation for vacation. I have spent a lot of time planning this...I have spent a lot of money going here...I am spending days away from work and taking time off of work... So, when I am on vacation, I need to make sure that I am doing what I want to do at all times. So recently my wife and I were on vacation in Orange Beach, AL. We got up that morning and asked what we should do together. She is like, "I want to go to the beach." And I am like, "I hate the beach. I really do." I know that is weird – but I feel hot, I feel dirty, I feel stuck. I do not really enjoy the beach. Adalee could be on the beach all day, every day. So, we just went back and forth. She is like, "I want to go to the beach." I am like, "I want to go to the coffee shop and read. That sounds restful to me." She is like, "No. I want to go to the beach." And I am like, "No. I want to go to a coffee shop." She is like, "No. I want to go to the beach." I'm like, "No. I want to go to a coffee shop." So being the good husband that I am, the pastor that I am, the follower of Jesus that I am, we got in the car, and we drove to the beach. And I dropped her off and drove to a coffee shop. That is what we did on vacation. We ended up splitting up because we could not agree. Because when you are on vacation, you want to make sure that you are doing what you want to do at all times!

Around the same time, we are back in Waco and my wife was 9 months pregnant. And she said, "Nate. We have to go to the hospital because we are about to have our baby." And I said, "But, I want to go to a coffee shop and read today." No! Of course not! Because when you have a mission – our mission was to make sure that our baby got here healthy. That was our goal! That was our mission. When you are on a mission, it does not matter what you want to do that day. Your needs, your desires do not matter. Because what I knew was what I needed to do that day is not what I wanted to do. It was to get my rear end in the car and drive us to the hospital, because we had a mission to accomplish. When you are on mission, your desires do not matter as much.

See there is a difference between a vacation mindset and a mission mindset. A vacation mindset says, "I am going to do whatever I want to do whenever I want to do it." A mission mindset says, "I am going to do everything I possibly can to accomplish this mission." Church – we are not on vacation here! Our time on earth is not a time to kick back, relax, and do whatever we want. We are at war with an enemy. This is what Paul says all across 1 Thessalonians – Jesus is coming back. Jesus is coming back. Jesus is coming back. Our mission is to make sure that all of you in Thessalonica are ready for Jesus' return. And our mission here in Waco, TX at Harris Creek is the exact same. Our mission is to help everyone follow Jesus and make sure you are ready for Jesus' return or the day that He calls you home. We do not have time to mess around. We are at war. Which means that the mission of our Life Groups is abundantly clear. It is to make sure that everyone in your Life Group is as ready as possible for the day of Jesus Christ.

And some of you get it. Like some of your groups get this. You are focused on the mission of helping each other follow Jesus, so you do not do what you want to do – you do what you know you need to do. So, some of you have seen this in group even this week. You stayed up far past your bedtime counseling a couple who is struggling their marriage. It is not what you wanted to do; it is what you needed to do. I have known groups where people in their group, they actually do not go out to eat that week. They take that money – for about a month – and then they take that money, and they give it to someone in their group who needs it. It is not what you wanted to

do; it is what you needed to do. I have known people in groups who babysit kids for free who do not even like kids, but the couple needed a break. They needed a date night. It is not what you wanted to do; it is what you needed to do because you were focused on the mission. You laid down your desires to do what is best for everyone around you. This is what Paul is telling the church in Thessalonica to do. Lay down your desires for the sake of the mission. Everyone needs to be sure that they are ready for the day of Jesus Christ, so lay down your desires. Because point number two – biblical community is selfless. A biblical community is selfless.

So, let's see how Paul finalizes this section of Scripture – telling us how to live in community biblically. He says this, three fantastic verses, **“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”** These verses are the verses that distinguish our group, our community. Our Christian community from all other communities on earth. Because Paul says that we can rejoice always, we can pray consistently, we give thanks in all circumstances. I do not know of another religious organization, political group, or ideology that can say that. I don't. That you can rejoice at all times, you can pray at all times, you give thanks at all times. I do not know anyone else who can make that claim. Because as Christians, we are weird. We believe really weird things.

In fact, this week. On Tuesday night, here at church, something happened here that was weird to the outside world. Because we had a memorial service for a college student that passed away this summer – incredibly painful. She passed away in a car accident. Her parents were in the car behind her and saw it all happen. I mean, just cannot even imagine. I cannot even imagine. So, we got their community together and they got on the microphone and started sharing things and how they were processing. These are juniors in college – they are going through something no college junior should have to experience. And they got on the mic, and they said things like, “I do not understand. This has been the most painful season of my life. I am frustrated. And yet in spite of all these things, I rejoice. I do because I know that my friend is with Jesus. She has been welcomed into His arms. He has hugged her. He has wiped away every tear from her eye and He has said, **“Well done my good and faithful servant”** and she does not remember death or sin anymore because she is with Jesus. So, while this situation is hard, I am grateful.” Because as Christians we do weird things. In all seasons, at all times we can rejoice.

3. Biblical Communities Rejoice Together

Because here is, again, what separates us from everybody else. As believers in Jesus, we do not always have to celebrate our situations. We do not have to look at life with a blind optimism and say, “everything is awesome all the time”. It is not. There are hard things that happen. Sometimes you will not like your situation. Sometimes your situation will be incredibly painful. Yet Paul says to rejoice always, pray consistently, and give thanks in all times. Why can he say that? It is because as believers in Jesus we do not have to rejoice in our circumstances, we do not have to rejoice in our season, we do not have to rejoice in our situation. We can always rejoice in our salvation! That we know that Jesus Christ came on a rescue mission to seek and save that which was lost. All of which we were! And He saw us in the muck and the mire. He picked us up; cleaned us off; and set us on a brand-new path. He forgave our sins. He forgave our past. We have a hope and a future. So, I do not care what this world does! I do not care what it does around me. I do not care what it tries to do to me. It cannot touch what Jesus has done to me,

what He is doing in me, and where He is taking me one day. This is what we believe as believers in Jesus. We have hope at all times!

And yet, many times we leave Life Group bummed out. I do not know if this has happened to you. Sometimes there are just hard Life Group nights and that is okay. But sometimes, there are seasons where you leave in the same mood or even a worse mood than when you came in. When that happens, think about what you all talked about. What did you talk about during your time together? Did you talk more about politics or Jesus? Did you talk more about your job or about His work in you? Did you talk about how much his wife is frustrating, how hard his kids are, or how he still hasn't spent any time with Jesus this month? I mean if that is the case, what are we doing? Why are we even getting together? Because as Life Groups here at Harris Creek we get together with one purpose. We do not get together for supper club. We do not get together because our kids are the same age. We do not get together because we live in the same area. We get together because we have been saved, redeemed, and forgiven by the God of the universe. When we get together, we get to celebrate what He has done in our life and in the lives around us!

I don't know about you. Maybe you follow Jesus better than I do. But I need this! I am so quick to forget the goodness of the Gospel. I am. It is so easy to be overwhelmed by this world. It is easy to be overwhelmed by my job, by finances, by a lot of decisions that I have to make. IT is easy to be overwhelmed. So, I need my brother to remind me that Jesus is better. That Jesus is good! There are those times in my life where I just feel like I do not have anything to offer and I need my sister to remind me that my worth is not in what I do, but in what Jesus has done for me. This is what we do as believers in Jesus. We get together to remind ourselves of the goodness of the Gospel. We rejoice together. We pray together. We give thanks together. Are you actually doing that as a group? Do you actually pray together as a group? Do you actually share about what God has been doing in your life as group? Maybe the most important thing you can do this week to bring your group a step forward is to show up and say, "I just want to share what I learned in Scripture this week. I want to share about an encouraging conversation I had this week." Rejoice together! Because this is what we are called to do as a biblical community. Point number three – a biblical community rejoices.

So, in summary:

- Point 1 – A Biblical Community Identifies Needs
- Point 2 - A Biblical Community is Selfless
- Point 2 - A Biblical Community Rejoices Together

You know I opened up by talking about all the problems of community. Like when you get in community you have to take on other people's problems You have to start dealing with their addictions, their anxieties, their depression, their sin struggles, etc. etc. etc. When you join a community, you join with other people's problems. But that is not all. Because when you join a community, you do not just join their problems, you get to join in their victories. Because we do not just see hard things happen in community, we see God move in amazing ways through Life Groups. We have seen marriages restored and healed because of what happened during their time in Life Group. We have seen people find freedom from their sin because of their time in Life Group. They brought a sin to the light that they had been dealing with for years, at times

decades. They never thought they would tell anyone. They brought it to the group and God used it to heal them from that sin. To find freedom from their past.

In fact, recently in a Life Group we saw someone come to faith while in Life Group. Then we baptized them here. So let that be an encouragement to you. If there is someone in your group who you are like, "I am not even sure if they know Jesus..." They might not. What an opportunity that God has placed you there to help bring them closer to Jesus. This is what happens in Life Group. A couple of months ago we had a winter storm, and our Life Groups went to work. We saw Life Groups make meals for each other. We saw Life Groups take other Life Groups into their homes. We have also seen Life Groups do painful things, but beautiful things. We have seen Life Groups come around a family who lost their child and helped them bury them. We have seen Life Groups come around someone in their group who has cancer or whose parents have died. Hard things, but beautiful things. Good things for your soul type things.

Because you see what I said at the beginning, the problems of community are far less than the problems of isolation. But also, the victories in community are far greater than any victory you will see in isolation. Because in Life Group God wants to use you. Because here you show up and you are one of a 1,000. There you show up and you are one of a few. If you want to see God working you have to be activated. You have to be engaged. You have to go to work. You have to make sure that everyone in your group is following Jesus. You get to be used by God in community.

Friends, I just want to close by saying what Paul says to the church in Thessalonica. Jesus is coming back! He is. Or you are going home to be with Him. I want to make sure you are ready. I want to make sure all of us are ready. And in order to be ready, we need to be plugged into community. This is not my idea. It is not my thought. It is not JP's opinion or Harris Creek's opinion. It is God's opinion. He has put it in His Word. He has put it in Scripture – that community is biblical. And I have found that whenever you live in biblical community it is just simply better.

Let's pray that would be true of us as a church.

Father, thank you so much for your Word. That you do not leave us on our own. You do not leave us in isolation. You do not leave us to our own devices. But you call us to do things that sometimes we do not want to do. You call us to things that we are not even sure how to do. So, Father, right now, as we are sitting in this room, I am sure we have a lot of people thinking, 'Man, our group can grow in this way. Our group can grow in this way.' I pray that you would empower you church to do what they know needs to be done. That they would challenge people and also care for people. That they would rejoice together. That they would be selfless with one another. And as we create these beautiful communities of Jesus followers, that the outside world would see a picture of unity. They would see a picture of the Gospel that they may have never seen before. And church, I just pray that our communities would be healthy. That they would not be founded on gossip. They would not be found on any other discussion or topic other than you. Other than your Gospel. Because we are only here today because you have seen us, you have saved us, you have forgiven us. Father, we just want to worship you for that. Not just on Sunday

mornings, but on Wednesday nights. And on Wednesday mornings. And whenever we might meet as a group. I pray that it would feel like this. That we could remind ourselves of the goodness of the Gospel. That Jesus is better than this world has to offer and that we have a hope and a future because of Him. So, Father, we just want to worship you know and rejoice in the fact that Jesus is alive, and He is with us, and He is for us. It is in His powerful name that we pray. Amen