

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Fool Proof
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Fool Proof Counsel

Harris Creek, good morning! I just returned from a gathering of pastors and heard from just a wise man who was sharing about how preachers of revivals in days past would approach the pulpit with fear and trepidation and reverence. And he was comparing that to today and how, you know, we have our hands in our pockets and we're pacing around the stage; using cool illustrations and cool shoes and whatnot. And I just have been thinking about that and if I am honest, teaching through the Proverbs can feel like more tips and tricks and like practical wisdom. So I am kind of fighting that in my heart this morning of wanting the Spirit of God to do something. That in a minute when you leave here and you return to your cars, it is very possible that there's a supernatural work that happens in your hearts over the next 35-40 minutes together. And so, I am just going to pray that that would happen. That the Lord would make all of the changes that he wants to make and then we will dive back into the Proverbs.

So, Lord I know that your word does not return void and that your Holy Spirit preserved the book of wisdom which tends to be more practical in nature than looking into the resurrection and an empty tomb. I just ask that you would speak to us today. That there would be a changing that happens in my heart and their hearts, whatever work you want to do. That you would protect us from the enemy. That you would protect us from the one who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy this morning. Remove the distractions; that as we read from your word that is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing both bone and marrow, that you would do the work that you desire in us. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

One of the most memorable trips I have been on was to the country of Jordan and into an area called Petra, which is one of the seven wonders of the world. Monica and I had the opportunity to go with Scott and Kristen Kedersha, Scott is on staff here, and a small team of people - mostly pastors - and we were there visiting the Holy Land. We went over into Jordan and it is something that I will carry with me the rest of my life. It was just breathtaking. It was beautiful. If you are not familiar with Petra, I will show you a picture.

So, this is the entry when you go in that is carved into rock. And you think, 'Oh, I would go there just to see that.' But it is actually one hundred square miles of that. Those things are everywhere! This is one of the more famous ones, but there are these carvings into rocks all over the place for 100 square miles. You walk through these things called Siqs there, which are like valleys; there's just a wall of rock on each side of you. And so, we are navigating that and we get to this... The Apple Watch said, on that particular day, that my wife and I hiked 14 miles. That is not just 14 miles on a sidewalk, that's up and down - changing elevation. And so we're getting close to

sunset and closing time for the park, and we're somewhere between one and 14 miles away from the gate that we entered into. And so, I'm trying to figure out, we're collectively trying to figure out how we're going to get out of this park. So I find this Muslim woman named Hanan and she's there in her hijab, her head covering, and I go up to her. She is a firecracker! I mean she's just feisty and I say, "Hey, how do we get out?" And she is like, "Well. What? Didn't you not plan well?" And I am like, "No, we didn't and what do we do?" And she says, "Well, I can get you out, but it's going to be very difficult." And I said, "Oh, well, we'll just go out the way we came." You know? And she says, "No, if you just go back the way you came, you are going to get stuck inside the park. They will close the gate and you will have to stay the night inside the park." I'm like, "Well, let's go back to your plan then." And she says, "But you guys will have to stick together. And it is going to be really challenging, but I can lead you out." I'm like great.

And so we kind of begin to go through those things called Siqs. I think I have a picture of us just kind of navigating those pathways and there's walls and rocks to climb over. There's rivers that we have to kind of navigate over. In fact there's one that I'll show you just kind of how difficult this is. There's me with my head covering, where we're trying to get across, because that's much deeper than you realize right there. And we're trying to get across that river inside that Siq. So, it was not child's play, right? And in the midst of that, there were arguments and there were quarrels and we continued to come back to the same question. "Why didn't we just go the way we came?" That was easier. That was the easier way. And she, Hanan, would remind us, "Hey, you wouldn't make it out that way. It is the easier way. It is an easier walk, but you wouldn't get out. This is the only way out of the park right now." And she was she was a firework.

I remember one thing she said. She actually took off her head covering. And we had been sharing the gospel with her and I said, "I thought you couldn't take that off." She said, "No, I just can't take it off around men. So, I'm fine." (Crowd laughs) "Alright, lead us the way." You know?

I share with you, because today in the Proverbs I'm going to present to you two paths. Alright? The path of isolation and the path of community. The path of isolation leads to death. The path of community leads to life. Which might cause you to think, 'well, the path of isolation is difficult and the path of community is easy.' It is the opposite. Isolation is easy. Okay? To walk in isolation is easy. You can go faster. You can do what you want, when you want, where you want, with whom you want. Isolation is easy, but it will not lead you to where you want to go.

Community is difficult. It's challenging, there's conflict, and you have to have very hard conversations with people not like you. It is sanctifying. It is sharpening and with it comes wisdom and health and life. These are the promises from these principles in the Proverbs - wisdom, health and life. In fact, if you apply the message from the Proverbs today, when you go to your car, you will leave this place wiser than when you came in. You will increase in wisdom. You will increase in your ability to parent. You will increase in the ways that you date - increase in wisdom. You will increase in wisdom in your marriage. You will increase in wisdom in business if you apply the 8 Proverbs that I'm going to present to you today to your life.

The path of isolation, it's easy, but it leads to death. The path of community - we call them Life Groups here, it is how we do community - it is very difficult and very challenging, but it leads to life.

We're in a series called Fool Proof, from the Proverbs, where we're gleaning wisdom from the book of wisdom; mostly written by King Solomon. There are about a dozen Proverbs that if I was to summarize them in my own words, they would simply be wisdom comes from the council of many. An avenue or a pathway or a pipeline of wisdom entering into your life is to have a consistent group of council from believers, yielded to the Holy Spirit, with some knowledge of God's word. Hopefully, an increasing knowledge of God's word. But the cry of our hearts, what all of us desire underneath the head knowledge that we know we need community is isolation. Because with it we equate it to freedom. We can do what we want to do. And the most difficult thing, I believe, for Christians to believe right now - for you to trust right now - is that what you want isn't best for you.

People doing what they want leads to them starting failing businesses. It leads to bankruptcy, consumer debt, entering into a toxic marriage. Like why? Why is the divorce rate so high? Because people make decisions based on how they feel in isolation. At some point in the very near future, no matter how smart you are, what your GPA is; no matter how much knowledge you've memorized, you will make a decision in the near future that is toxic to you. And it's hard to believe that even right now as we sit in church. 'Oh yeah, Oh yeah, yeah.' But when you're making that decision, and the collective counsel around you is saying "No, no, no, no, no." And you say, "I don't want to hear that. You're mean. I don't want to listen." And you continue to isolate yourself, this is how death happens. This is how spiritual death happens. We think we know better; left to our own device, left to our flesh, we think we know better.

You can become a Christian. You can get saved by trusting in Jesus, in His death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins. Just you and Jesus. That is how you can become a believer. To grow as a Christian, you have to then be planted in relationships with other believers. There is no spiritual growth in isolation! If you're arguing with me in your head and you think, 'Well, what about the apostle Paul? He was in prison.' Paul was in prison longing to be reconnected to believers. This is what his letter said, 'I long to be with you; to see you again. Grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.' Jesus came to the earth to assemble His people! God getting his children back through his son, Jesus Christ, to assemble His people. There is no spiritual growth in isolation - different than solitude. Solitude, "I am going to spend some time alone with God today," is different than living in a season of isolation. I'm going to go my own way, the way that seems right to me.

Proverbs 14:12 says, **There is a way that seems right to a person, but in the end, it leads to death.** It is a great proverb. I wish it was in there twice, it is so good. I wish Solomon would have, Oh, oh... Proverbs 16:25 says, There is a way... Another one, a second one. He did put it in there twice. **There is a way that seems right to a person, but in the end...** that way that seems right, smells right, tastes right, looks right, feels right is death. It leads to death.

People do not ruin their lives when they do not know what to do. Because when you don't know what to do you are like, "Hey, hey, help me. What should I do? I do not know what to do. I'm going to pause... I do not know." People do not ruin their lives when they don't know what to do. They ruin their lives when they know what to do, they are just wrong. People do not ruin their lives when they do not know what to do. They ruin their lives when they know what to do, but they are just wrong. They are operating in isolation. And so, we have to, to grow as a believer, be planted in relationships.

What kind of relationships? Dysfunctional relationships. Hard relationships. Challenging relationships. Relationships with people who are not like us. They don't dress like us; they don't think like us; they do not shop like us. They don't go where we go. Because it's the manifold wisdom of God, the mosaic aspect of the body of Christ is the diversity of thought coming together with one common bond in Jesus Christ. All saying we believe that this man raised from the dead and we have that in common and not much else. And so I'm going to be so much more effective if I have eight people around me who sometimes think different than I do than if I have eight people around me who think just like me. But when you have that diversity of thought, you have conflict. So, to remain in community we have to be diligent and work hard at preserving the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace - resolving conflict. It is hard. It is a challenging path, but it is the only path that gets you to where you want to go.

And so as we move through the Proverbs, we're going to look at a healing and a prevailing success that can only happen in the context of community. A healing and prevailing success that can only happen in the context of community. If you want to turn with me to Proverbs toward the middle of your Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus. Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, keep going, 1 and 2 Samuel, keep turning, keep turning. It is in the middle of your Bible, turn to the very back and I will start in Proverbs 28. We'll jump around. All of these verses that I present to you this morning, you can just write the word "community" by them. It can be a resource as you're moving through the Proverbs as you're reading one a day. Or when you return to that, you'll see, oh, this is a great verse for my Life Group.

Proverbs 28:13 says, **Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.** Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper. But one who confesses, and renounces finds mercy. My first point this morning from the scripture is:

1) In isolation we conceal, with confession we heal.

I am going to give you three things today that are aspects of community, that you should experience in the context of your life group. And we are going to juxtapose them or compare those with what happens in isolation. So, in this first point, in isolation we conceal, but with confession we heal. People do not join Harris Creek... They come here, they visit, they go into the membership class, they hear more about the church, and they get to this word confession and they say, "I am out." "You want me to talk about what I do wrong? Uh-uh. Why would I do

that?" These are the conversations we have, and they do not join the church. They say, "Why do we confess? What are we, Catholic? Why would I want to tell other people what I do wrong?" To find mercy. And, if you do not, you do not prosper.

James, Jesus' brother, wrote a book in the Bible. It's a commentary on the Sermon of the Mount, and it's known as the New Testament Proverbs. The Holy Spirit preserved this in chapter 5, verse 16 of James. Confess your sins to a priest. No, no. That is not what it says. **Confess your sins to who? To each other. And pray for each other so that you may be what? So that you may be healed. For the prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective.** What the Holy Spirit is telling us, through his servant James, is there is a healing that only comes by way of confession. There is a healing in your life and the way to that healing is to confess to other believers and have those believers pray for you so that you may be healed. "That's all cute preacher talk." Except, I have tasted the sweet and delicious flavor explosion of truth in this verse in my own life.

I am a man that when I came to the faith had many vices. A full suite of vices to choose from. Things like materialism and drug use, alcohol, love the parties and then all the run of the mill, self-righteousness, pride, arrogance. But the one that I present to you the most, because it gripped me the hardest, was pornography. Sexual addiction, I was a slave to pornography. And I would have told you that I'm going to be a slave to pornography for the rest of my life. I'm never going to be free from this, I don't even know what that would look like. And then I enter into a church in a larger context, I go through a membership class, I enter into a church in the smaller context, a small group, and I began to confess that sin. Which is humiliating. Not just embarrassing but humiliating. And I find mercy amongst God's people. And they say, "Oh, let us pray for you." And these people scattered throughout a city at random times of the day and of the week, they pray. "Here's a verse, I'm praying for you." "This is what I'm praying for you." "Let me pray this for you." They were praying for me. Sometimes I think we just overlook this, like "Hey guys, stop. I am not just confessing this again. Would you guys pray for me?" And I experienced healing that I would say I do not think it would have been even possible had I gone to inpatient rehab. I experienced a healing.

In the context of community, I think there is a longing in some of our hearts, we call it confidentiality. I think a better word for it is secrecy. Proverbs calls it concealing. We want to keep something that we have experienced from everyone else. There's a principle around that in the Proverb, we get stuck. The path might be easier, but you don't get out. You remain a slave.

I am an enormous advocate of counseling. Please leave here with that sound bite, lest you hear me say something else. I am a fan of counseling. My mother is a counselor. I have seen a counselor myself. I refer dozens of people to counselors. I am a fan of counseling. Just like doctors, there are good and bad doctors. There are good and bad counselors. Just like there are good and bad pastors. OK? Just because you go to a University and you leave with a degree, a license or a certificate, it does not make you good at what you do. And so, as you see a counselor see a good one. A good one is not going to strike the deal with you, "Hey, you just keep for the

rest of your life showing up and telling me your secrets. And I just won't tell anybody. And that's going to be the relationship. I will be your friend for hire." A good one is going to push you toward healing. And a part of healing is you sharing your story. That is how you know you're experiencing real healing; you can talk about it to other people and let the spirit of God use it in your life.

My friend says this and I was like, "Can you support that with Scripture?" And she said, "Yeah, absolutely." Great conversation. She said, "The devil is only defeated by the blood of Christ and our story." I thought, 'Wow, that is really good!' The Devil's only defeated by the blood of Christ and our story. I said, "That's great. You know. I mean, is there a scripture that supports that?" Revelation 12:11 - **They triumphed over him [that is the devil] by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony.** So, if the devil is defeated by the blood of Jesus and our story, then don't you know that he's going to do all he can to get you to keep your story to yourself? He does not under any circumstance want you to practice confession. Because what happens with confession? Healing happens with confession, and he loves to keep you sick! He loves to keep you sick.

So, see a counselor but do not let them replace community. See a counselor, it is amazing. See a really good counselor. See them often. Do not let them replace community. Is community safe? No. No. Everybody in that group is a sinner. They do sinful things. They are capable of all sorts of evil. Well, how can I trust them with my story? You can't. You can't! Trust God. Pray like crazy that the spirit of God stirs in their heart. Listen, if they betray your confidence, the church, we are going to get involved. We are going to come around and say that was not your story to tell, OK? Now you are, in the context of Harris Creek, in a disciplinary process because you did something grievous to somebody in your group. That was not your story to tell. And we will come around, but I cannot promise... There are a lot of people here. I cannot promise you that no one here is ever going to repeat your story for the wrong reasons. I wish I could, and I hope they don't. But don't let that fear keep you in a prison. You do not win. You don't win.

Confession is not a punishment, it's a path to restoration and healing. Confession is not a punishment, it's a path to restoration and healing. It is a way that we can course correct. We have gotten off the path, this how we get back on the path. Which is why Proverbs 12:1 says this, listen to this, **Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid.** Alright! Say it like it is God. That is a word I don't even like my children to use, OK? But he is making a point. There's a part of us that we have to long to be corrected. We have to know that we don't have it all figured out and we need help. We need others speaking into our lives. Listen, your pastor – let me speak something that is true of me – I dislike correction. I don't love discipline, which means there are areas of my life where I am ignorant, foolish, and need to grow so that I would move to a place where I love correction and love discipline. Proverbs 15:10 says, **Stern discipline awaits anyone who leaves the path; the one who hates correction will die.**

Remember, we are talking about two paths: one of isolation, one of community. My second point:

2) *In isolation we derail, with correction we prevail.*

In isolation we come off the tracks and with correction we are able to find victory and success, the proverb says. We are able to prevail. We're able to move back to the path. Left to yourself, you will come off the tracks. Why? Because you want to do what you want to do, when you want to do it with whom you want to do it.

On the freeway, you want to drive as fast as you want to drive. You want to be able to color outside the lines if you want to color outside the lines. You want to be able to buy whatever you want to buy. Nobody likes people telling you what you can buy. Especially when you really want to buy something! You've done the research and, "I'm so excited about this coat! It is going to be amazing, it is going to look amazing. It is going to keep me warm." "Hey, I don't know if you need that." Right? We want to do whatever we want to do with whom we want to do it. Because one of the greatest desires of your heart, as you sit there right now, is freedom. You want freedom. You want absolute freedom. And here is what you need to know and for some of you this is going to be new information for you. There's no such thing as absolute freedom under the sun.

See absolute freedom is why you store away money. It is why you work hard. There's something in your head and your heart where you think, 'Hey, if I get to this place then I'll be able to do what I want to do.' We will be able to travel whenever we want to travel, wherever we want to travel. I won't have to work all the time. It is freedom! There is no such thing as absolute freedom. The greatest freedom that you can experience under the sun is you making yourself subject to something or someone else.

Let me explain. I can be free from my toothbrush, but not free from cavities. And in fact, in the fourth grade, I fasted from my toothbrush... (crowd laughs) for a year. Oh really, a lot of judgement. I was in the 4th grade. I was like, you know what I am not going to brush my teeth. I am going to go a whole year... I don't even know that I planned for a year, but I ended up going a year without brushing my teeth. Seven cavities. Seven cavities. To be free from the toothbrush, I can't be free from cavities. Do you see how that works? There is no such thing as absolute freedom. It is not real; it does not exist. So, you have to figure out, 'What am I going to be subject to?' If I want to be free from cavities, I've got to be subject to my toothbrush. If I want to be free to go the right way, then I need to be subject to the compass. I need to figure out what I'm going to come under, the influence of, who is going to speak into these things.

And the problem is, we do not like correction because it hurts. It hurts our ego and our pride. It hurts! And we think friends do not hurt us. That is not what the Proverbs say. It says, friends hurt you faithfully. Proverbs 27:6, **Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.** Your version might say **faithful are the wounds of a friend.** That wounds from a friend are faithful. You want to have friends in your life who wound you faithfully. Now this is not permission to be a jerk.

That is not what this is. This is not where you get to say whatever you want to say when you want to say it. This is not you doing whatever you want to do. No. This is you having the right people in your life, asking good questions. And if you're like, "Well what if I don't have the right people in my life?" Let me give you a really powerful question to help you. "Do you have a scripture that speaks into that?" Because everyone is going to say, "Hey, my wise uncle..." "I read this article in business weekly..." or "Here's a thought for you..." "Here's something that you should think about..." You know? "Here is some advice..." "This is something I saw on Twitter..." Just say, "Hey, do you have a scripture that speaks into that?" So that they then are sharpened to lean into scripture and you are receiving scripture; having scripture inform the decisions and the correction.

And then here's another question. Is it morals or is it values? Morals or values? Morals is right or wrong, sin or not. Values is, "Eh, I would not do that. That is not how I would roll." Like everybody has values. "I wouldn't buy a car for more than this much money." That's interesting, you know. "I wouldn't go there." "I wouldn't send my kids to public school." That is great. That is interesting. That's you and that's your values. OK? But that's not to say that it's sin for anyone to send their kid to public school. You have to understand that. Is it morals or values? You can speak into that and say, "Hey, it's not Scripture and I don't have a verse to back it up. This is a take it or leave it kind of situation." or "Here is something that I see as a pattern." And you can just say, "Hey, would you pray about this?" "Hey, I do not know. I could be wrong. I am not coming at you with the conclusion. I am not making a judgment. I am raising a concern because you have the Holy Spirit and I have the Holy Spirit. I sense this from the Holy Spirit, you should ask the Holy Spirit if it is legit. If it's something that you should consider."

In my marriage, we got married as brand-new believers. And like, I am a coach to a fault. You know? Direct. Don't do that, do this. Turn this. Go here. No, no, stop that. You know? Super gentle... And turns out, that is not really conducive to intimacy in marriage. Who knew? But there I was. If I'm honest, like the first couple years of marriage, it felt like parenting to me. That is the role that I saw that I was playing. Like, oh, hey, this is what we got to do. This is where we need to go. Stop that. You know? And she could not call that out in me. Or if she did, I did not listen. But these guys in my life, they said, "Hey, you're harsh, you're not gentle, you're not cherishing. You are inconsistent with what Ephesians 5 says. With what 1 Peter 3 says. With what Colossians 3 says. You are not living according to what the Scriptures call you to." And they were right! And with that correction came a softening, not immediately. They had to tell me several times, still tell me at times. Still tell me at times.

And then I felt so helpless because there's Monica, and I have permission to share this with you, but she did not like correction. If someone told her that she was doing something wrong, it repelled her. "I don't want any of that. No, no, no, no. I don't like correction." And I felt so helpless because then I'm telling her what she's doing wrong. It is repelling her. It is not like the sweetest intimacy of our marriage happened in those years. But then those girls came into her life and they became my biggest advocate. And this woman who hated correction became the

single most godly woman I know. And that's not an overstatement. And I'm an expert. I spend a lot of time with her. I know her better than anybody. Right? I see her behind closed doors. And we say, I talked about yesterday, what caused that change? She began to desire correction. She began to want people to wound her faithfully. Still doesn't love it. But knows she needs to love it and growing in that end.

One of the greatest signs of spiritual maturity is correctability. One of the greatest signs of a foolish heart is an unwillingness to be corrected. And it's counterintuitive. You think as someone grows more mature, with more wisdom and more verses, then they need less people speaking into their lives. But the people that are actually growing more spiritually mature want people speaking into their lives. Their own depravity gets bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and they become more aware of it.

We always say trust yourself the least when you want something the most. Trust yourself the least when you want something the most. We are all master justifiers, and this is why we invite others in to speak into our lives which leads me to the next Proverbs. Proverbs 11:14, **For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisors.** Proverbs 15:22 is like it, it says **Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.** Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors - the word is there - they succeed.

3) In isolation we're distressed, with wise counsel we find success.

In isolation we're distressed, with wise counsel we find success. If we were back up, we see confession, correction, and now wise counsel. These are important aspects of community taking place in the context of your life group. Listen, wise counsel is different than correction in point 2. Correction is what happens when you leave the path, wise counsel actually keeps you on the path; proactively keeping you on the path. And so, there's decisions that we want to make when we want something the most. Right? There's something we want the most and so we should trust ourselves the least. But this is when we don't want people speaking into our lives. Why? Why, if there's something we want, why wouldn't we want others to speak into it? Maybe you are a parent or maybe you can remember saying this to your parents. "I knew you were going to say no." "Why didn't you ask me?" "Because I knew you would just say no." I knew you're going to say no. I knew you wouldn't let me do it." And that's cute...when you're 8. Not when you're 28, 38, or 68?

Listen, there's a demographic here in the church that really struggles with this, and it actually tends to be the older, wiser sage. That grew up... "Listen, I'm independent. I don't need a lot of people to give me advice. I've been around. I've seen everything. I've done everything." And what you're really saying is, "I know better than the Bible. I know better than God, who calls me - multiple times - to wise counsel." And it's under the "banner" of maturity. It's not real maturity, it's counterfeit maturity. Because spiritual maturity looks like being subject to, and inviting in, consistent wise counsel.

Companies are run by boards. Churches are run by boards. Listen, there's a board of elders that I am subject to. They are authority over me. We meet weekly and they speak into my life weekly. I too am in a Life Group. In our Life Group we process financial decisions. For a long time, we would say, you know, if we were to buy something over \$500, we would process that in a group. That has changed with inflation. We're revisiting that right now and saying, "Hey, what should that number be now as seasons of life change." And I'm not here to be legalistic and to give you a number. You should talk about in your Life Group, what is that number? But for people to speak into my life, to say, "Hey you can or you can't." They know what I make. What I give. They see how we spend. They have to have information. You say, "Well wait, I want to keep all of that confidential." I just see something different in here (pointing to the Bible). I just see something different in the scriptures.

We have a process here, that you may not be aware of, that churches all over the country are adopting. It's how we do this, how we prepare messages. We're a church that wants to raise up pastors, preachers and teachers of God's Word. So, we have people that we bring here just to invest in them, to help them be better communicators of God's Word. And then what we do every Monday, I start in a room. Some people start in an office with the door locked, full of commentaries. We start in a room with multiple people there. And there's older women there. There are younger women there. There are people who graduated from seminaries there. We are all there and we are talking about the word of God. We are saying, where do we need to go? What does this mean? And we begin to write a message. And whoever is going to teach the message takes it, they work on it. There are actually multiple people who write the same message every week. So, everybody's kind of in it together, raising up communicators.

And then on Thursday, they stand on this stage and they give the message to another panel of people - older women, younger women, seminary grads, people in different seasons of life. Everyone there gives it a grade 1 to 100, 70 is passing, and they give it line by line feedback. The message changes shape and you put it on the shelf, and you pick it back up and you change the message and you preach it here. It happened this week. It happens every week. Any message that you hear from this stage, from anyone at Harris Creek, goes through that model. Now churches are calling from all over the country saying, "Hey, what are doing? We want to do that. What is your system like? Can we go there? Can we learn from you?" Praise God! And they are like, "Man, how did you come up with it?" And I'm like, "I didn't come up with that. Solomon did." It's just a simple idea that eight brains and hearts surrendered to the Holy Spirit are better than one. That is really all you have to leave here believing this morning. That eight people surrendered to the Holy Spirit are going to be wiser than you by yourself surrendered to the Holy Spirit and really, really, really wanting something. That is it!

Every week I get an e-mail, or emails if you will, from other places and other churches. Now I try not to spend too much time in pastoral care situations of people at other churches and so I have a template formed e-mail that I send in response. Because their e-mail, it's usually multiple pages, and it's like, "When we met and she was there and her parents came from... We both like Chick-fil-a and this is her order... I was there and I got the shake of the week and then we

walked along this path” and then somewhere in those five pages is a question. What would you do? Or what should I do? And I am sitting there trying to find the question. And so, I began to respond with this. First, I encourage you to be a member of the local body. I want to make sure that you have some community around you. A consistent group of believers around you speaking into your life. What I’d encourage you to do is to get all those people in the room at one time, not a one off here and a text here, a group text here. Everybody in the room at one time, right? And give them all the information that they need to help you make an informed decision. Pray like crazy that God would speak to you through them, as He often does. Ask them if there are any scriptures that should inform that decision, and then sit on your hands and keep your mouth shut and listen. And that is what I would do.

And I can resend that e-mail in response to just about any situation out there. Who should I marry? Where should I work? Where should we move? What should I do? Am I called to this? Here is what you should do. And I would just present to you, maybe you guys would find that helpful even to do in your own life groups. Show up, get everybody in a room, give them all the information they need. Pray like crazy that the Lord would speak through that. Look for what is unanimous, where everybody is aligned. Sometimes that is the Spirit of God when everybody's in the same place, hearing the same things.

In our LifeGroup, I meant to say this earlier, I will just say we practice confession. I show up. I confess. We do input, output, confession. Or how did you feed your soul? How did you feed others? How did you feed your flesh? These are the three questions we answer every week. And sometimes not every week. Sometimes there is a week or two or three that go by where we don’t, but we are always quick to return. We always return to that. In the lull, who is next? Here is how I fed my soul, this is what I'm reading, this is what I am listening to. Here is how I fed others: this is discipleship, evangelism, conversations I've had about Jesus. And here is how I fed my flesh. And we do not wait till that moment to do that. Sometimes we are on a group text. ‘Hey man, I just saw something on Instagram that I should not have. Please ask me about it. Would you guys pray for me today?’ It is in that group text that when we get there, ‘Hey, what was that?’ But we confess life, so you don’t chicken out between now and then. These are things, practical things, that we practice, that might be helpful to you.

Do you believe, collectively, that eight people surrendered to the spirit of God bring more wisdom to the table than you? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one gets to the father except through him. You want to get to heaven? You want to be with God forever? Jesus is the only way. OK? Jesus never intended for you to get there alone; for you to journey on that path yourself. But that you would be surrounded by others.

In summary, in isolation we conceal, but with confession we heal; in isolation we derail, with correction we prevail; and thirdly in isolation we are distressed, but with wise counsel we find success. It is confession, correction, and wise counsel. Those are huge benefits of community.

When we went through that really difficult journey home in Petra, we did end up making it out of the park. She was right. She led the way and we got to a place where we were able to exit. She

took us to this alternative fence, if you will, and we were able to get outside the park. And here is a picture of us. This is the team that made it. We lost a few...no we did not. This is the team that made it and so this group of people here now work at different churches and different ministries in different states across the country, and even in a few other countries actually. We do not have a lot in common today, but we all experienced that together. And every now and then Facebook TimeHop, or some memory pops up and they'll be a group text. "Hey, remember when..." They will send the picture of us with our back against the wall or trying to scale. There was like a 12 foot wall we had to scale where one person just had to completely go like this with one person on your shoulders and then you had to climb the two people to get out, reach back and pull the others up. I mean it was like really intense. And we made it through together. And now we, forever in our lives, are bonded to that moment.

I think a lot of you are looking for community. You want to find friends that are just like you, that you guys can do things. Those are not the healthiest groups. They tend to drift towards supper clubs. They start to meet, and they say, 'What are we here for?' And they do not grow spiritually. But when people get in community with other people, not like them, they do not think like them... That are bringing different things to the table, it is really, really hard. It is very difficult. But when you are committed to it, and you work to resolve conflict that sometimes takes long seasons and you get through it, community is not found it's forged. Real community is forged, not found. I just say that to you as an encouragement. That just because it is hard doesn't mean you are doing it wrong. And this is a shepherding model here.

Listen, some people, in some churches, they do community as outreach. They are open groups. They're missional to bring people. We do it as a shepherd model. That those are your pastors. They're meeting with you on a consistent basis to spur you on to love God and love His people. To know his Word. That is what we hope is happening in your group.

Let me pray.

Father, I do just pray that you would help us in that effort to know you more and greater. That you would continue to shape us into the image and character of your son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for the favor that you have shown us. The favor that you have shown this place. Thank you for the gift of confession. It is not a punishment, but a path to restoration and healing. Thank you for the gift of correction. That when we leave the path that you're kind to bring us back to it. Your Holy Spirit works through people to bring us back to the path. And thank you for the benefit, the enormous gift, of wise counsel. That we do not have to make decisions on our own, by ourselves, in isolation. But You, through the collective wisdom of your people can show us the way to go by the power of your Holy Spirit. It is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen