

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Trent Horner
Series: Life Together
March 20, 2022

Committed
Romans 12: 9-18

“9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Harris Creek, how are we doing this morning? We doing well? Good. Hey, I want to see a poll of the audience: How many Dallas Cowboys fans do we have in the room? I want a hand raised high—loud and proud. Sometimes it’s a hard hand to raise. It’s been a rough go, but man, if you’re a Cowboys fan like me, the last couple of weeks have been crazy. It’s NFL free-agency season. So, if you’re an NFL fan, you know this. Right now, NFL teams are deciding who they’re going to keep and who’s going to go. So, for the Cowboys, we have some big decisions to make. Amari Cooper, he’s been traded to the Browns; he’s gone. That’s a shame. Tank Lawrence, is he staying, is he going? We resigned him. Randy Gregory, big decisions, he’s staying last minute—he’s going. Now he’s a Bronco. Man, my heart has been all over the place. Free-agency has been a challenge.

People that know me well, know that potentially—I would say for sure top two—favorite TV days of the year is the NFL Draft. I am a draft geek. I care what Mel Kiper has to say. I want to know who we’re picking at 24. I am all in on the NFL draft.

I grew up in Irving Texas, and so that’s actually the old home of the Cowboys. Old Texas Stadium, may it rest in peace, it’s no longer there. But I grew up about 4 to 5 miles from there. So, we actually grew up with season tickets to the Cowboys. I was locked in at an early age, because these were the glory days. We know these, the cowboys’ fans, we remember. These were the good days. There’s been some bad ones lately. But I just want to tell you I am a committed Cowboys fan. My wife, Whitney, she will tell you, if it’s a Sunday and the Cowboys are playing, if it’s a Sunday night, a Thursday night, if we’re on Monday night football, you can know where I’m going to be. I’m going to be watching the Cowboys, and I really do become that obnoxious football fan that you all hate. I become that guy. I actually have a picture of someone. (A picture of a Dallas Cowboys fan in the stadium wearing sunglasses and a *very* large Cowboys football helmet is displayed) That’s not me, but that could be me. Okay?

Alright, so when it's a Cowboys' game and the Cowboys are on, I'm emotionally invested in this game. You can find me sometimes pacing the room, if it's a high-pressure situation, if there's a last second field goal, you do not want to be under the same roof as me. I've been known to yell at the TV before, and as I say these things out loud, they become a little bit more indicting. But if Whitney's going to ask me a question during the Cowboys' game, I probably didn't hear the question, and you cannot count on my response. And so, I hope this is painting a clear picture for you. I am an overcommitted Dallas Cowboys fan. I am all in.

I begin there this morning, because we're going to spend our morning talking about this idea of commitment. About what it means to be committed to things. And I believe, if we're not careful, us—the church, and really everyone, but specifically in the church—that if we're not careful we can find ourselves being too committed to the wrong things. Really, overcommitted to the wrong things. If you're like me, it's really easy to look up and realize that our lives are more of a mirror image of the world than they are of Jesus. And that's a problem. So, this morning we're going to talk about this idea of committed. For you guys in the audience, I want to have a little bit of a dialogue. What are some things that you can tend to be overcommitted to? Shout it out. What's something you can be overcommitted to? Work, job! That's great! March Madness, man! Man, I think we all raised our hand. One more, what's one other thing you can be overcommitted to? Crypto? Okay! No doubt!

I came up with a list of my own. Here's some things that I see in our body, things that we can be overcommitted to. We can be overcommitted to school or to work. We can tend to find our identity in our profession or in our school and our grades. We can be overcommitted to our kids. We have three kids under the age of eight, and I can find myself being overcommitted to them. That really, I find my identity in my kids. That I tend to push them too hard at things, but really, it's my identity, it's my issue; and that's really working itself out through my kids and through my parenting. Sometimes we can be overcommitted to things, where we find our identity in trinkets and treasures. The newest nice house, new cars, extravagant vacations. We can find our identity in those things. And some of us, we can be overcommitted to isolation. That we have been hurt, or we have been burned, so we have really committed ourselves too that never happening again. So, we've really isolated ourselves emotionally or from other people so that we don't get hurt again. Everyone and everything are vying for our time and our commitments. So, I would ask you this morning, whose opinion in your life matters most? When you think about what you should be committed to, what voices are you listening to? And I believe that as one of the people responsible for shepherding this body, the Lord has placed me in this role specifically to talk about this over and over and over again with us; that our commitments matter. What you're committed to, it matters. They're a reflecting of what you value. I can tell you what you're committed to by looking at things like your schedule, your pocket book, all those things. Our commitments matter. If I'm an informed sports fan, but I'm an uninformed believer and I don't know God's word, that's a problem. If we have a life that look incredibly successful by the eyes of the world, and yet have a heart that's far from the Lord, that's a sign of bad priorities, bad commitments.

And so, I'm excited for a few minutes this morning for us to talk about the idea of commitment. And specifically, this morning, as JP said, we're going to talk about what it means to be committed in community. At Harris Creek what we call that is a "life group". What it means to

be committed to life group. And so, we're really finishing this 3-part series called Life Together. We've talked about three things which we're saying are the building blocks of community. What we mean by that is these are the three things that we're going to hold all life groups to at Harris Creek. That you could know if you're being successful in community, if your group is embodying these three things. Over and over again this is the language you're going to hear from us. We're trying to make it simple. What does it look like to do this well? It looks like doing these three things and knocking them out of the park.

In week one my good friend, Scott Kedersha, he's an amazing friend, he's our marriage and family pastor, he talks about what it means to be authentic. Our first building block was authentic. What does it mean to be authentic in community? We could never live out this vision of Biblical community that God has given us if we're not doing this from a place that's real, that's honest. If we come to life group every week and we're always coming in and not sharing what's true about ourselves. If we're not confessing the actual sin that exists in our lives, God can never do what He intends to do in our life groups. So, we have to be authentic.

And then in week two, John Green, my good friend, talked about what it means to be Biblical. Week two was Biblical. What does it mean to be biblical in community? As believers, our lives have to be informed by God's word. We have to know it, we have to trust it, we have to live underneath its authority. We have to do that in life group as well. That when we gather on a weekly basis, that when the guys and the girls meet or when we meet as couples, that everything we do, we want to come from a foundation of what's Biblical. What God's word says. Because we've all got great opinions about how to live our lives, but we know that enduring wisdom comes from God's word, so we want to be founded on it.

Week three—this week—to wrap up the series, what does it mean to be committed in life group? What does it mean to be committed to one another in community? That our life groups have to be marked by a deep, enduring commitment to one another. This morning we're going to look at Romans Chapter 12, we're going to be in verses 9–18. As you're turning there, Romans 12:9-18, we're going to look this morning and see how commitment to community is based on love. Commitment to community is a test of endurance. And a commitment to community is a fight for unity. As you're turning there, just a bit of context for the book of Romans. The Book of Romans is a letter that Paul wrote to the church in Rome. And the city of Rome was really a cultural epicenter at this day. Lots of different cultures, different types of people. This is a new church that's growing, so all these different cultures are being assimilated into the Church. One of the 30,000-foot ideas that is portrayed in this book is the idea of unity. What does it look like for the church to be unified underneath the banner of Jesus? If we've all got different things informing the things that we believe, the ways that we raise our families, the organizations we're involved in, we've got to figure out some common ground. Paul is calling the Church in Rome to be unified.

And really, you can break this book down into two main parts. Chapters 1-11 are really theological in nature. The first 11 chapters of this book are much about Paul calling people to believe rightly. What does it look like to believe in Jesus and to believe in the Gospel in a way that's informed, theologically sound? Chapter 12, where we're going to spend our time, through chapter 16, is a practical portion of the book. He's basically saying, "If you believe these things,

we should then live in this way.” In Chapter 12-16 it’s a practical exercise. What does it look like to live these things out?

So, in the first chapter of the book of Romans are two verses that many of us are very familiar with. Romans 12:1-2 says, **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”** Paul begins this chapter with a call to live sacrificially for one another. That we can never live out our faith in a way that’s self-serving. We have to offer our bodies as a sacrifice. The way that we can do that, as he says, is by a renewing, the renewal of our lives that starts by a transforming of our minds. And then he follows up these two verses with another portion of verses that talks about this word picture of the body of Christ. We see this often over and over again in Scripture, that we as believers, the bride of Christ, are describes as a body. We all play a different part, we all have a role to play, and we have to live these out in unison to really live out this thing called the body of Christ. The bride of Christ. That we are a body that works together.

And then we get to Romans 12 verse 9, where we’re going to spend our time this morning. He begins in verse 9, **“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love.”** These first couple of verses in our passage this morning, Paul really outlines the basis for our commitment in community, which is love. My first point this morning is that a commitment to community is based on love.

1. Commitment to Community is Based on Love

If we’re going to get this right, if we’re going to get community—life together—right, if we’re going to get life groups right, we have to begin from a foundation of love. And I feel like that could be obvious, but I think we miss this so often. We have to love one another if we’re going to be in community with one another. Paul begins by saying this must be a sincere love. What does this mean for our love to be sincere? It means that it has to be honest, and true, and real. That we have to actually want and intend to love one another. It can’t be the thing we say in community, it has to be this thing we embody as we move towards one another to make true. The Greek word for this love, in God’s word, is *Phileo*. That’s the same root for the city of Philadelphia, which we know is the city of brotherly love. This type of love that Paul is describing is a brotherly, familial type of love. The same type of love you would feel for your best friends or your family. He’s calling us in community to this type of love. A familial, brotherly type of love.

If you’re like me, and I’m very practical, what does it mean to intend to love people in this way? I think the way that we do this, most practically, is that we have to move towards one another and we have to learn—we become students of one another. We have to learn to love one another. You’re not just going to roll out of bed one day and love someone, you have to intend and move towards people to become students of each other. You have to learn what one another like and what one another dislike.

I learned this early on in marriage. Whitney and I were first married, it was either Whitney's first or second birthday, and I took a lot of time to get a really meaningful gift. I was so excited to give it to her. And I intended to get her a card, but I didn't get her a card. I got her a gift, but I forgot the card. It's the day of her birthday and she's opening this gift, and I was so excited for her to open this gift—so excited. And she opened it, and it was clear that she liked it, but it was clear that there was something I missed. Guys, you've all felt this before. It's like, "Man, I missed something here." A little bit later in the day, we had a conversation, and she said, "Hey, thank you for that gift." I said, "Yeah, it was like you opened it, but you didn't really like it. What was it?" She said, "Here's the deal: I need a card. Okay, for the rest of the rest of the rest, I love gifts and you can always give me a gift, but I want you to hear me say that I care about a card. Words of affirmation—words are important to me. So, I would really like a card. And honestly, you could miss the gift and get the card and it would work out better for you." And so, I learned from early on in marriage that my wife needs a card. Guess what? That was a gift to me, because I've never missed a card again. I didn't do that again.

But in community, we have to do this. We have to learn to love one another. What do each other like? We have to learn this. We have to become students to one another. We have to remember important dates like birthdays and anniversaries. These are the things that matter to people. Okay? In my life group we do birthdays big in our life group! We go big. The person whose birthday it is, you get to decide where we're going to dinner. Most recently we went to Austin as a life group. Just for the evening. So we went down to Austin, we had a great meal, and we came back. But we had a long lingering meal where we talked and celebrated the person whose birthday it was. And we spent a lot of time just building that person up. You don't have to do that, but I think it's important that we remember big days like birthdays and anniversaries. We have to understand one another's stories. It's why we begin all new life groups with life maps. We learned really early on that it's important for us to know where each other comes from, our family of origin, where you grew up, your story. We care a lot about one another's story because I can love you in a much more informed way if I know your story. I can admonish you; I can encourage you in a more informed way when I know the things you're prone to, and the places that you've been and the ditches you've stepped in before. So, we have to know one another's story.

We have to know how we're similar and different from one another. My friend Marshall, who I'm in community with, he's an Aggie. But guess what, for me to love Marshall, sometimes I have to be about the Aggie game with him and I have to wear maroon. I would never do that, I would never actually wear maroon and watch the Aggies if I don't have to. But you get the point, we have to do things sometimes that we don't want to do, so that we can come alongside others and love them in a more full and complete way.

Early on in the formation of a life group, honestly, we get this sort of feedback a decent amount. It's usually within about two to four weeks of a new life group forming, I hear people say, "We don't really have a lot in common. We meet on Wednesday nights and it's fine, and we read God's word, but I just don't really enjoy them that much. Like, we don't have a lot in common." And my response always—first off know that two to four weeks on life group is super early, and you've got a lot of life that we would intend and hope you would live together. But man, the thing I always respond to that with is, "What have you done to move towards them? What have

you done? Have you figured out what they like and dislike? Have you tried to do something that they enjoy? Have you laid yourself down in pursuit of them?" Know that this will never work, community will never work if it's all about us. If we come into life group hoping that our needs and our priorities are the ones that are met, and we just expect everyone to come towards us. You have to lay yourself down in order to love one another. We have to intend to love each other. Love requires investment, love requires effort. And we have to learn how to do that well in life group.

I believe that love, the way that we love one another specifically in community, is potentially the greatest apologetic or testament that we have to the watching world about our love for Jesus. Because, we'll talk about this morning a bit, but man, our world is marked by divisiveness. Our world is not marked by this sort of sacrificial and enduring love. And if we could learn how to love one another in community in this type of way, I believe the world is going to see that, they're going to notice it, and they're going to want to hear about Jesus. So, I believe that this sort of love is the greatest apologetic potentially that we have.

We see this command to love all throughout. There are a few things I highlighted, a few places. In Matthew 22:37-39, is the greatest commandment. That you would love God and love others. Right? In John 13:35, Jesus says to his disciples, "**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**" And so, people, if we're going to be effective in community, if we're going to last in community, it has to come from a foundation, a place of love. What does this look like in life group? How does this play out in life group? I will tell you, that the groups that do this well, it's obvious. If you encounter them together, they're enjoying one another. They laugh together, it's clear they know one another. As JP said in his video, they spend time tother. These types of groups, it's clear. My friends, Steve Wilson and Jeff Walter, I love talking to them about their life group, because what happens when I say, "Hey how's life group been lately?" The first thing that happens is this huge smile comes across their face. And they begin to talk about how much they love the people in their life group. And they talk about all the ways that they've been served by their life group when they were on the mat. It's clear that my friends, Jeff and Steve, love their group, simply by the way they describe them and talk about them.

A real practical thing, I already mentioned, have some shared experiences together, have fun together, go do something together. Go to dinner, play a game, right? Go to a game. Do something fun! These are ways we can begin to love one another more effectively. These are some of the practical things that I think are obvious sometimes, but groups miss very easily. We can be really good at checking off the boxes of life group, but we don't really do the things that help us love one another.

So, for you, you might be sitting there today in the audience and thinking, "Man, my group is so far from there. We're really in that category you mentioned where we don't really enjoy one another, how do we do that?" I would just say for *you*, *you* have to hear this call individually. *You* have to go first. Would *you* be the one that goes first in your life group? Would *you* take the risk, would *you* love first, would *you* step out, would *you* become students of the people in your group, and would *you* model for the other people in your group what you intend the group to be like. It's going to be risky, but you have to go first. We have to all take this call to go first to

love. And again, I said this a little bit, but loving Year One, love in Week Four often times looks very different than it does in year two, three, four, five... You've got to start somewhere. But if you're here today and you intend to be there, how are we going to get there? This is something that grows over time.

We actually call groups at Harris Creek "life groups" for a very specific reason. Because we intend that you would live a lot of life together. That you would be in this group for years and years and years, and that you would grow to love one another, and you would know one another in such a way that you really embody this thing that is called Biblical community.

Again, we hope that you have a long future ahead in life group. We're going to go back to the text and pick up in verse 11. Paul says, "**Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.**" My second point this morning is that a commitment to community is a test of endurance.

2. A Commitment to Community is a Test of Endurance

A commitment to community is a test of endurance. Right there in verse 11, I think Paul is kind of clapping his hands and saying, "Wake up! Wake up!" And I think my friend JP does this really well for us often. It's like, "Hey, we are on mission together. We have been given a task, we have been given a job—all of us, as believers." And we're going to live that out in community as well. But we have been given a task, we've been given a job. He says, "**Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.**" We have to be reminded that this is a war time, that there is a war going on. We can't fall asleep to the reality that people are perishing around us, and we have been given a mission by the Lord to go and make disciples of all nations. We see that call very clearly in Scripture. So, Paul is saying in verse 11, "Don't lose that. We're on mission together." And then he breaks into a few different phrases that have this sort of long suffering—enduring nature—to them. He says, "**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.**" See, we know a lot about our closest relationships most often because they have withstood the test of time. I would guess that for most of us, we can look at our most impactful relationships, and often they're the ones that have stood by us. From a long time ago, since we've been through many things together, we've been in ditches together, right? We have endured hardship together. Our most meaningful relationships are the ones that withstand the test of time. "**Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.**" He's saying stay in the game with one another, don't walk away when it gets challenging. Pray for one another diligently.

Have you ever trained for a long-distance race? Have you ever trained for a half-marathon, a marathon, an Iron Man if you're real crazy? Have you ever trained for a long-distance bike ride? My wife is a little crazy, so in our first couple years of marriage, she said, "Hey, we should run a half marathon together!" I want to tell you right now, when she said that, I thought she was crazy. Because I don't have a lot of endurance, that's not something I've been known for the majority of my life. But we did it. And we said, if we're going to do this, we're going to do it

right. So, we planned this huge training program where we're running specific mileage months and months before the race. We're getting up every day or in the afternoon after work, and we're running a specific amount of miles. It's all so that we can build up this thing called endurance. So that when the day of the race comes, we're prepared for this race. Training for something like that requires intention. You're not just going to wake up and be able to run a marathon. You've got to train for it. You've got to build up endurance. And that race was *so* difficult, but yet we made it. I made it across the finish line, which was my goal. But it was because we planned and we trained for it. And I would say, what if we approached our life groups with this same sort of long-distance mentality? That when we began in community with one another we understood that this isn't just for this next 12 months, or the next 2 years, but that our eyes should be on years and years and years down the road. And that we would grow in our love for one another over a long period of time.

If we treated our life groups in this way, we would have a long-term vision. We would have to have a plan to succeed. That's part of my job here, to help you and your life group have a plan to succeed. So, you're not just going to roll out of bed and figure it out. You've got to figure out, okay, if we're here (Trent motions to a place with his hand) today, and we want to be here (Trent motions to a farther place with his other hand) in ten years, how are we going to get there? We've got to have a plan.

You're going to encounter challenges and trials along the way. Expect that. I will say, that's one of the biggest difficulties in life group, is that you don't think, "Oh, we're going to have conflict. We're going to have arguments; we're going to disagree. We're not going to see eye to eye." You have to know that that's coming and when you expect it, it doesn't catch you by surprise. We'll talk more about conflict in a minute, but we have to know we're going to encounter difficulty in community together. And then we have to encourage one another to finish the race. We've got to encourage one another.

Many of us are marked by a desire to bail when the first sign of conflict hits. And I will tell you that is probably where I spend more time, and more of my energy, and thoughts, and prayer for our body here. It's that when conflict hits, we bail on community. We tend to do this thing where when our life gets difficult and we say, "Hey, we're going to figure it out, we're going to back out of life group, we're going to back out of community for a bit. We'll figure us out, and then we'll come back in when we've kind of cleaned up." And I will just tell you, you're missing out on God's gift to you in community. That really, the reason we put you in community is specifically for that. That when you're on the mat, we see this parable in Luke that I don't have time to get into today, but the paralytic on the mat. And he has friends that pick him up when he's on the mat and get him to Jesus. And that's part of the most enduring vision of life group, that when you're having a hard time, your life group is going to be the one that's going to carry you to get you to Jesus. And when things get hard, we can't bail, we have to lean in. That's not a language we're fluent in in 2022 in Waco, Texas. But hear me say, when difficulty hits would you move towards your community and not pull away? That's one of the biggest things that we have to learn in community.

The Scripture that we have planted our flag on in community at Harris Creek is Hebrews 10:24, 25. It says, "**24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good**

deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” You see, I think a lot of us, a lot of our life groups at Harris Creek are in this bad habit that the author of Hebrews is talking about. A lot of us are in the bad habit of not meeting together. You will never succeed in community if you are not consistently gathering together. We have a clear call to life groups at Harris Creek, that you would meet on a weekly basis. That you would have consistent meeting. Because like JP said in that video, as you look at successful life groups, the ones that succeed are the ones that are consistent. And so how are we going to stay consistent in meeting together? We have to keep going. This is the call of community—the call of consistency.

And then to finish out this section, in verses 13-15, talking about how does this play out in life group. Paul gives us a few clear ways, a few clear ways to help one another endure. Endurance, to develop endurance. The first thing he says is you have to share when one another are in need. I hope this is obvious, but when you're in life group together and someone's in need, *you*, the people that you are in life group with, you are the ones we're asking to help meet those needs. We can't miss that. So, if someone can't pay rent in your life group, I would hope that your group understands that that's your issue to solve. That you are one another's provision, right? And so, the first place, the first line of defense for all needs at Harris Creek is in life group. You have to share with one another when we're in need; emotional needs, physical needs, tangible needs, all those sorts of things. We have to share with one another when we're in need. It's such a travesty when people are in need and their life group misses it. When they're asleep at the wheel. What does it look like for us to be present when we're in need?

The second thing he says is to be hospitable. Be hospitable. There are people that have the gift, the absolute gift of hospitality, and we all know them. Because what they do is they're committed to creating spaces that groups can thrive in. So, the way that I see this hospitality played out in community is we have to invite one another into our homes and into our lives. “Hey, my house is your house, what I have is what you have.” I've heard it said this way, “If I have a dollar, the people in my community have a dollar.” We are one another's keeper, we are one another's provision, and so how do we practice hospitality with one another?

And then the last thing he talks about is being present, being thoughtful. To mourn with those who mourn, to weep with those who weep. We've got to draw near to one another when we're on the mat. That doesn't necessarily mean that you're going to have all the answers. Sometimes life groups miss this because they think, “They're having a hard time. I don't even know how to help solve their problem.” I will tell you, almost always, people aren't looking for you to solve their problems, they just want you to be near to them. They want you to come close to them when they're hurting and not move away. We can miss that so often. So be hospitable, mourn with those who mourn, weep with those who weep. These are the ways we can help one another endure in community. We help one another endure by being committed alongside them. By moving towards community when the pressure is turned up. And we must remain unified.

Let's go back to the text for our final point this morning. Verses 16-18. Paul says, “**16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace**

with everyone.” My final point this morning is that a commitment to community is a fight for unity.

3. Commitment to Community is a Fight for Unity

A fight for unity. I think we all realize this. We are divided in 2022. You look around, if you turn on the news, if you scroll social media, if you're just honestly anywhere, it's clear that we are a divided people. We can find anything to be divided over. Here's a few things I think we can be divided over: Whataburger vs. In-n-Out. Man, that's a hot one. Costco vs. Sam's Club. I don't think we're actually divided over this. I think it's clear, Costco is better than Sam's, but you can be divided over that. How about Spotify vs. Apple Music? I'm going to say, this one caught me by surprise, because I came on staff and was here a few years and it became obvious that I used Apple Music, and I got roasted on that. I got roasted, so I guess that's a highly contested one. How about Laurel vs. Yanny? Anybody remember that? Man, it's wild. Okay, and this is a big one for me, this might be one of my biggest hot takes. John Green might say this is one of my biggest food hot takes. But you are either all in on cream gravy with your chicken tenders, or you're out. So, I just want y'all all to hear me say this, this is my hot take: cream gravy on chicken tenders is trash. It's trash. So, ketchup, honey-mustard, ranch, I am all in. But cream gravy with chicken tenders is trash.

But seriously, you guys. I think division marks our day-to-day. It marks us as a culture, we are a divided people. And so, here in Romans 12, Paul is calling us to unity. That if we are going to get community right, we have to be unified. We have to be unified. We have to live with unity. Our unity, our love will give off such an aroma to the watching world, and it will draw them into the Gospel and invite them in. So, why don't we live in unity with one another? I want you to think about that for just a second. Why don't we live in unity together? Think about your life group. Think about your friendships. What are the reasons that we don't live with unity?

Paul talks about it here in verses 16-18. He talks about some of the reasons why. He says, **“Do not be conceited.”** When I read that what I see is, “Don't be proud. Be humble. Don't be conceited. Don't be full of yourself.” This plays out most often in life group because we think we can do it on our own. We think we've got it. We don't need anybody's help. I don't need you; I've got what I've got. I'll take care of me and my own. But this individualism marks us, and I think it's something that can kill community. We step into community, but we don't really ever intend to live in community. We step into community and we read God's word together, we check the box on a weekly basis, but we don't ever intend to love one another and live in unity and to live relationally connected. We can't be conceited. We can't be so puffed up that we're unwilling to live in community with one another.

He says, **“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”** Don't repay evil for evil. This is like getting a grudge. It means when we're wronged by someone in community, or when we're wronged by somebody, and we think, “Oh well, I'll just get them back. I'll ice the out. I won't talk to them for a while. I'll throw a dagger at them to get them back.” We can't repay evil for evil, specifically in community. That kills unity. We want to win. And then I think Paul's mic drop moment in this passage is verse 18. So, if one of these verses is going to stick with you today, I

hope that it would be this last one. Verse 18, Paul says, **“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”** Live at peace with everyone.

A really practical way I’ve thought about this, and I’ve been encouraged in this, is if you think about the challenges and issues you face in life group, if you will draw a circle around yourself and change everything inside of it, that’s the most effective thing you can do to be more effective in life group. To be more unified. You can only control you. You be an agent of peace. You be an agent of reconciliation. You intend to be unified with your community. We hear this line at Harris Creek all the time, “You can’t judge obedience by the outcome.” So, if you would, do what you hope your entire group would do, and that you would be faithful and that you would be obedient to living in unity with the people you’re in community with. I’m certain it will end up working out for the best.

The talking point here is really conflict resolution. That for us to maintain unity in life group, we have to be quick to resolve conflict. So, the way that this works out in life group is that almost all of the big conflict—the things that stick out to me over the past year of shepherding the body—are things that ended up really big, but started out really small. It’s almost always a comment that was said at a life group meeting that wasn’t ever addressed. You received something in the wrong way from somebody in life group. Maybe even they said it and you heard it in a way that was different than they intended, but you don’t ever have that conversation. And so, what ends up happening is that grows. We don’t deal with it and it grows. And then maybe a few other things happen, and then over the course of months you’re really bitter and frustrated at somebody, and they have no idea. And so, then what happens is you’ll explode. It’s going to come out—something is going to happen, and it’s going to be an explosion, and it’s going to create lots of mess in community. I would just say the thing we have to learn is we have to be people that are diligent to preserve unity in life group. If I’m sharing in life group and I say something to my friend Brad, and it’s clear he receives that in a way that’s a little like, “Ah, man, that may have caught him on the wrong…” That after life group I’ll just go up to him and say, “Hey man, when I was saying that, it just seems like that hit you in the wrong way, are we good?” Can I tell you my friend, Joe Daly, on staff here, does this better than almost anyone I know? When we’re having a meeting together, he always, always comes around and says something like, “Hey, I want to make sure we’re good. I could have said something that potentially could have offended you, I just want to make sure we’re good?” That’s easy! We should be people that do that well. That we would preserve unity, even at the sign that something might potentially be off. That we would move towards one another to preserve unity.

1 Peter 5:8, it’s a verse that you’ve probably heard often here. It makes clear that we have an enemy. It says that the enemy is prowling around like a roaring lion, waiting to devour us. I believe I see this with clear eyes. One of the clearest ways the enemy wants to attack Harris Creek is by creating division and sowing seeds of disunity in life groups. He hates what we do in life groups. He hates that we gather together under the banner of Jesus, so he’s going to do anything he can to create division and divisiveness. So, we have got to be on guard. Un-dealt-with conflict is one of the most common strategies of the enemy.

A couple of other passages that highlight unity in God’s word, Ephesians 4:3, **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”** John 17:21, **“that all of**

them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” Jesus talks about his unity with the Father. There’s lots of common reasons for a lack of unity in life groups. Missed expectations; that you intend that your group would meet *this* often, and you’re only meeting *this* often. You don’t communicate well, there’s difference in preferences, that you would rather do *these* types of things when you gather, but everyone else would rather do *these* kinds of things. A lack of care and concern and follow-up. I said that before, when someone’s on the mat and people in their group miss it, that creates division. Apathy or a lack of motivation, often times I see this a lot, that there’s somebody or multiple people in a group that just are apathetic—they don’t care. They don’t care to show up, they don’t care to prepare, they don’t care to lean in. That creates division. Hurtful words or actions, obviously.

I believe that if life groups at Harris Creek are marked by unity, we will stand as a clear testament to God’s love and enduring faithfulness to us. We have no desire at Harris Creek to just propagate a program. We don’t just put you in small groups just to check a box and have something to roll out there for you to be involved in. We want you to love Jesus. And the best way that we, in this body, know how to help you love Jesus is to put you in a small group of people that are going to learn to love, to know you, to admonish you, and to encourage you to love Jesus. That’s the best strategy we have at Harris Creek. That’s why we do it. That’s why we believe so much that every member would be in a life group.

So, in summary this morning, a commitment to community is a commitment to love. A commitment to community is a test of endurance. And a commitment to community is a fight for unity.

I began my morning talking about my overcommitment to the Cowboys. Man, it’s true; it’s frightening. But here’s another thing that’s true. I have an eight-year-old son named Becket, and the thing that I hope most, that I pray, is that when my son is my age—when he’s grown, when he has a family—that he looks back and thinks about the things that I was committed to. I pray and I hope, and I think this is going to be true, is that the thing that he sees is that I was committed to Jesus, and the way that he would know that is because I was committed to community. Because I can tell you the thing that has made me more like Jesus more than anything in my life is my life group. I hope that my son tells stories to his friends about, “Hey, in our house growing up on Wednesday nights, our family was committed to life group. In our living room a couple of nights a month, there were people gathering underneath the banner of Jesus. That they were loving one another. Sometimes there were tears shed. Sometimes there was great laughter and we were always wondering what was going on in that room.” But that my son would look and see that his dad loved Jesus, and that was because he was committed to community. And I pray that that would be true of us at Harris Creek. That we would be committed to one another in community. And that the world that’s watching would see our desire to love one another with endurance, with commitment, with love, and they would think, “Who is that Jesus that they love?” And I would love to pray this morning that that would be true of us. Let me pray.

God, thank you for this morning. Lord, thank you for the way you love us, God. It’s so crazy. It’s crazy to think that you love us in a way that you’ll never leave us. That you’re committed to us. God, that you endure with us, that even when we miss it—even when we miss the boat, Lord—

that you don't walk away from us. And so, Lord, I pray that that love that we have from you would inform the way we are committed to one another in community, God. And so I pray for all the life groups at Harris Creek today Lord, that we would consider how we're committed to one another, and that we would have those conversations, Lord, so that we would be more committed to each other in community, God. We love you. We thank you, God, for the way you love us. In Jesus' name, Amen.