

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
Jonathan Pokluda  
Series: Ecclesia  
February 7, 2021

The First Assembly  
Acts 2:42-47

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

Harris Creek great to be with you! If we haven't met, my name is JP – Jonathan Pokluda, I have the privilege of serving on staff here. And just to kind of give you an introduction into my background as it relates to faith. I grew up Roman Catholic and the way that that happened, I am from a blended family, and so both of my parents were married before – got divorced. Brought in my half siblings and then, you know, had me – surprise! And so, the deal that they struck; so, my Mom was Lutheran, and my dad was Catholic. And they said, “Hey, if we have a daughter, she will be Lutheran and if we have a son, he will be Catholic.” And that was what they worked out. So, my parents went to church separately every Sunday morning. I mean, I didn't even know that was weird until I left the house. But every Sunday we would wake up and everyone would get ready for church and then we would divide, So, they had a son, so I was Catholic. And I went to a Catholic school. St. Michaels School for 9 years. We went to church on Fridays, we went to mass on Sundays. I would go to church sometimes a double header with my mom out in Myersville. This small farming community. And you know later on to her Lutheran church. I went to a Baptist youth group on Wednesday nights, called Teen Time. Lots of Church! Lots and lots of church.

And I was an altar boy, that means you put on the white robe and you carry a cross. So, they would pull us out of school to do a funeral, which if there was funeral we would get to get out of school and be an altar boy. I had nuns for teachers which evidently is not normal. So that was just kind of what that looked like, growing up in the faith. And sometimes I would visit my mom's church and once a year they would do something called “Church under the Trees”. And so, her church is like way in the country and there is a church and then there is a tiny “old church

building” and old stone church building behind it. My parents were actually married there. And then behind that church, there were these oak trees. And they would do this potluck. And it was, basically people bringing meals and spreading out at the banquet table. They would read the scriptures and teach the scripture and then they would eat. It was a feast! And it was beautiful, it was fun. And I remember as an eight-year-old boy, man there is something special about that! There is something unique about that.

And just to help you with the mental picture, I actually had a video on my phone.  
(SHOWS THE VIDEO and NARRATES)

And so, my grandparent’s house overlooked this field and the church. There are the oak trees where we would do “Church under the trees’ There is my grandparents’ house and field. Overlooking the church building and cemetery where their families are buried. That is the old stone church building with the cemetery there in the background. And then you can see my mom’s new church building in Myersville. That is to set the scene. There is the parsonage, where the pastor lives, and the trees again.

And so that is where we were, right? And I was an apologist for the Catholic faith. So here is what that would look like. I would defend the Roman Catholic Faith. If we got in a conversation, I would tell you “Hey you came from us, we were first and so you guys came from us. And if something dates back it has to be right” And that is the way I would argue with you as to why Roman Catholicism was correct. But then what happened was I started reading the Bible. And I got to where we are going to be today – Acts 2.

And as I read it, it really was reminiscent to what I had experienced at my mom’s church under those trees. It is like that is what I was seeing. That is what church seemed like. And I have this vivid memory of walking up to that old stone church and looking into the windows. And as a child imagining what that looked like. What did it look like to attend church there? What did the people do before and after? How long would it be? What would there day look like?

And there is value in looking at church history, because sometimes there are these things, we do that are modern that we embrace as normal that are different. Like I wonder if God looked down on us today, or if He looked at what we are doing today would He be like “Yes, that is exactly what I had in mind when I said church” 75 minutes on Sunday, or would He be like “wait, what happened – how did you get there?” A little bit of singing on the front, a little teaching. “That is not at all what I was thinking it would be like.”

How would we do? Are we hitting the mark? This is just where my head space has been in this series. We are in this series Ecclesia, and we said that is the word in the Scripture for church. But it does not translate church. In fact, when Jesus used it for the first time, He absolutely did not

say church, he said to recruit a people. To call out a people. We now translate it assembly. But even that is a modern translation. Or interpretation of that word.

And so, it just has me thinking, what is the bullseye? What does God want from us? So, what I want to do today, is I want to walk up to the window of the very first church gathering, and I want to look inside. And I want to describe what you would see. And then we will compare to what we are doing here. I've been in church long enough to know, that every pair of eyes that see me right now has something that they are really passionate about. I've met with the people through the past decade that are like "man we have got to be on mission, we have got to go overseas" "We need to give money asway." "It's all about Sunday School, Bible Study" Like everybody has something almost always rooted in their experience or their passion. And that is great but let's just look back. I think some of us would not have liked Jesus' church. He would not have been missional enough. He would not have been something – fill in the blank – enough. And so, we are just going to look at it today. We will look at it, and we will see what it was like.

And so, what happens in Acts is the Holy Spirit descend on the apostles. And it says, **there is power, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem**, (the city they are in), **in Judea and in Samaria** (the area that surrounded them). So, think in Waco, in McLennan County, and then He says throughout the world. You are going to go throughout the world – to be a witness just means to tell what Jesus has done. I want to tell you what I have seen and that was the message that they would preach. But it is almost like this big strong, powerful and you look, and they start gathering in living rooms just loving each other. Just eating together and worshipping. Praising God and teaching. That is what happens next.

And so, as we think through – we got to conquer the world. First, how are we doing? How are we doing at solving conflict, keeping short accounts, having conversations, loving each other, caring for each other's burdens, celebrating each other's victories. How are we doing? And so next week I'm going to talk about the church turning out, what we do when we go on mission, but today let's just look through the window and see how we are doing.

I look inside the first assembly; I'm going to give you 10 things that mark the first assembly. That's right, 10 points. Pray for me. Or pray for you actually! I am going to read this text – Acts 2:42-47 and then I'll break it into 10 things that marked the first church.

Peter just preached a sermon, and it says 3000 people were saved. Here is the interesting fact there. This church is about the same size as Harris Creek. So, what we are about to see – same size as what will happen on our property today.

**They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs**

**performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

There should be some things that you read there that you realize that we cannot accomplish in 75 minutes today. You need to start to think about your Life Group. That is your church. We gather here corporately, we sing some songs, we look at the Scripture. But then you go and do church throughout the week – you are the Church – throughout the week with this smaller group of people.

If you are not in a Life Group, today is not going to make a lot of sense. And you want to make sure that you are here tomorrow night. So really simple – if you are not in a Life Group be here tomorrow night. If you are in a Life Group, there is going to be application through this message for you to begin to apply this week if you haven't.

### 1. *Devotion*

**They devoted themselves** – we will stop right there. Three words, they devoted themselves. Devotion marked the first church. They were devoted. That is a bigger commitment than the word commitment. That's like here is my life, it is everything that they do. It says in verse 46 **Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts** – everyday! And so, what I want to do here, so we can be more aligned with the Scripture, I know we gather here on Sunday. But I want to begin to meet here every single morning – before you go to work that we would be in this room. If you are really committed...no I am kidding, I am kidding. But it would be biblical! If we did it would be more what the Scripture says.

So, when I say I am kidding, I am not trying to devalue what the Scripture says. What I am trying to do is say you should probably check on your Life Group about every day. “Hey, how are you doing?” “Hey, I prayed for you this morning.” “Hey, I am going to swing by after work and just give you a hug.” “Hey, I'm at Shipley's right now – do you need anything?” “Hey, can I bring you a cup of coffee, I'm at Common Grounds.” Every day check in on them. That's relationship – that's building relationships. And so, they were devoted.

We discussed in our Life Group recently, “Hey should we move from weekly to every other week” And I was like, “That's interesting, because we never even finish what we need to talk about weekly – so how are we going to do that if we move to every other week?” And so, there is a commitment here that it's the big rock. They began to plan sports and other things and the hobbies around this big rock of gathering daily.

And so, one thing that will help in your Life Group is to ask this DTR question – “what are we willing to miss for?” “Are we all on the same page?” Just show up and look everyone in the eyes and say “Alright guys, what are we willing to miss for? Are we willing to miss for sports? Are we willing to miss if we have had a long day? Are we willing to miss for a work function?” What are we willing to miss for and just make sure everyone is on the same page – and that will really bless your group.

It says **they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...**

## 2. *Teaching*

They taught the Bible and shared the Gospel. So, the first message was really the apostles bearing witness to what they had observed in the resurrected Lord. What was the sermon? What was the Bible? They had the Torah. So really, they are reading from parts of the Old Testament and they are saying, “It said this, but we heard from our Lord and Savior - when we walked with Him - this”. And they would clarify, and then they would write letters. And sometimes those letters would become the New Testament that we read in the Scripture today.

Here is an excerpt from the first sermon that was ever preached: Acts 1, verse 32 - **God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.** And so, when you show up here Sunday morning, we are going to read the Scriptures and explain them. And hopefully you bring a Bible, you can write in it, you can take notes. If you have it on your phone that’s fine too. But we are going to teach from the Scriptures.

But there is also an expectation of you, if you are here and a Christ-follower, that you would be in the Bible – you guessed it – every day. And if you don’t do that, we’ve served it to you on a silver platter [biblereadingplan.org](http://biblereadingplan.org). You can read what I read. We produce a commentary underneath so that you learn it. It is a great time of reflection, but that you would read the Scriptures every day. You’ve heard me say before, “no Bible, no breakfast”. It’s just something that helps me because I like food. And then when you meet with your Life Group, I hope there is a part of that time that revolves around the Scripture. And you say well how should we do that? Here is just a suggestion for your consideration. Whoever hosts that day, just have them start your time with what they learned that day. It doesn’t have to be a sermon that they prepared. It can just be a “here is what I read this morning, and here is the takeaway” and so whoever’s house you are at, that’s just how you start your time. I would suggest doing that.

It says **They devoted themselves... to fellowship...**

## 3. *Fellowship*

The word in the Greek is koinonia. If you have been in church long, maybe you have heard that, it means to hold something in common or to share something. So, what we have in common, regardless of your ethnicity, your age, our differences in sex, our differences in background, our differences in – you know – economic differences. Regardless of those, we have Jesus in common. That makes you family! Welcome home. Welcome home. And so, we fellowship around that.

1 John 1:3 says this: **We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have (koinonia) fellowship with us. And our (koinonia) fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.** It is a picture in the first church of one of intimacy. But let me be honest with you, today – right now – there are a thousand people on our property. An hour ago, there were a thousand different people on our property. It's very difficult to experience any level of intimacy with a thousand people. The bigger we get, the smaller we must become through these Life Groups. That you would come together and that you guys would not just have intense Bible Study, and intense prayer session. But that you would actually have fun together! That you would go make memories together. Go sit by a lake, go to a lake house. That you would eat together. You would go out to Ninfa's and get a big table or La Fa or wherever. And that you would experience that together. And so, something that will help you do that is in your group – this is what it says in verse 46.

**They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...** A picture of fellowship. They ate together with glad and sincere hearts. So, something that will help raise the value in your group is you have got to find the mushroom. You have got to have a mushroom in your group. Do you know what I mean by that? A mushroom in your group? You have to have a fungi (fun guy). So, appoint of fungi, find the fun guy, maybe fun gal. Whoever it is. They are enneagram 7, you know who they are. Right now, as a I say that you are thinking about them and you are like "Guess what, you are the fungi!" And what their job is now – you've appointed them, you've anointed them, you've laid hands on them – and you say "You make sure we do some backyard BBQs, you make sure we are eating together every so often, you make sure that a couple of times a year we are doing a retreat – an overnight. You are in charge of that – you are the event planner of our group." And that is going to serve you really, really well.

And it says, **to the breaking of bread** verse 42, back to verse 42, **to the breaking of bread.** Now in 46 you see they broke bread in their homes and ate together. So, there is this separation between the breaking of bread and eating. I believe this is Communion. Okay?

#### 4. *Communion*

Do you know what the biggest criticism of the first church was? Like the greatest thing coming against them in opposition was that they were cannibals. So, their critics believed they were cannibals because they would eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus. And so, you can imagine like if the rumor around Waco was “man, Harris Creek you’ve got to be careful they will eat you” and that really was the rumor around the first century church. Because something that they would do when they came together was, they would reflect upon the Gospel, they would search their hearts.

You know, I got a phone call this week from a guy who said, “Hey, JP – I was taking communion and I realized I have fostered some bitterness against you. So, will you please forgive me” and I said “absolutely, and man, tell me what I did to plant that bitterness” asked his forgiveness and we were reconciled. And that is a beautiful picture of what happens around community. The introspective of realizing hey have I sinned against someone, has someone sinned against me. Is there anything I need to own, anyone I need to pursue that I may be fully reconciled, right in the body of Christ. And then remember what God paid through His Son Jesus Christ on the cross.

We took Communion twice last week here, and then again in membership. We are going to take it throughout this series. But I want you to know you can take Communion in your Life Group and so if you have kind of someone who plays the role of the Priest in your Life Group. You know them, they care about these kinds of things; just say, “hey would you be in charge of making sure that every so often we take communion”. Now, some of you might think no that needs to be ministered to from a minister. 1 Peter 2:9 says you are all part of the royal priesthood, the holy nation of people believing or belonging to God. And so, you absolutely as a follower of Jesus Christ can take communion together. This is what comes from gotquestions.org which is a site I commend to you – write it down. Gotquestions.org. You need to know it; it is an amazing site. It says this, there is no Biblical reasons why the Lord’s Supper cannot be administered in homes among friends and family; in a home church setting; or anywhere else. The important thing is not location, but the remembrance of the body and blood of Christ whereby we are saved.

And it says they were devoted to prayer.

## 5. *Prayer*

The first church was marked by bold prayers. They needed God to give them courage to share the Gospel. This is what they prayed for in Acts 4:29-30 – **Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.**

They prayed big prayers. I'm convinced. I'm absolutely convinced that this place has moved forward on the faithful prayers of people. Like people have prayed us into the place that we are today. A part of what God is doing is because of the prayers. My friend Scott James texts me every Monday morning – how can I pray for you and Harris Creek? Right? I think of Monica Odell – constantly praying for this place. Ellis Snodgrass – prayer warrior, prayer warrior! God is answering her prayers. You are sitting in the wake of those answered prayers. I think of the Carols – Carol Wellston, Carol Nielson, Carol Underwood. Here is my takeaway – if you want a daughter who prays, name her Carol. The Lord carries this place on those prayers. Right?

And next door, in first service and second service Kyle Stevens and Jessica Hedge they have started an intercessory prayer opportunity for you. You can jump on that team if you are looking for a service opportunity, all of us can pray. And so that's happening, a huge part of what God is doing here. And so, in your Life Group assign a champion of prayer. Just say, "Hey, will you help us?" Give this some weight, "hey, will you help just make sure every time we gather – whether it's for a meal, fellowship, to hang out, whatever we are doing – would you make sure that we pray". So, think about who in your Life Group right now should own that. And you can take it, and just say "hey, you are the champion of prayer". It's probably not the fun guy, I'm going to be honest with you – it's probably someone else. But you find them and ask them to do that.

Verse 43, **Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles...**

#### 6. *Awe*

The first church had awe, a real sense of awe. And so, miracles authenticated the apostle's message. There is a doctrine out there Cessationism – believing that miracles have ceased. I'm not a cessationist, I believe that God still does miracles today. It's a fair question for you to say, "Then why don't we see what was happening in the New Testament, in the first century church, at Harris Creek today?" I have two answers. One it authenticated the Gospel. Right? And so, our problem is not that we don't know or understand the Gospel. Our problem with the Gospel is not knowledge, it's application. There is a Bible in every hotel room and a church on every corner. Our problem with the Gospel is that we don't share it. The miracle that God may want to do through you as it relates to the Gospel, is to give you the courage to push past your anxiety to engage someone that you don't know and share Christ with them. That in some cases, would be a miracle. Another miracle, "greater works than these" as Jesus says. Is someone coming to the faith. Someone coming to know Him. And my second answer to the question, "why don't we see these miracles?" I would say we do.



In the duration of my ministry, I've seen healings; I've seen prodigals return; marriages restored; hearts healed; hard hearts softened; lives changed. But there is a real sense of awe in what God is doing today at Harris Creek. I'm going to tell you something, I'm going to measure my words carefully. There is no overstatement here. Nearly every single Sunday someone will walk up – so every Sunday we've gathered, for a little while there we didn't gather, nearly every Sunday I think with only two exceptions – someone has come up. I say, "How long have you been in Waco?" They say, "We recently moved here." I say, "What brought you to Waco?" this is just the way the conversation goes every Sunday, "What brought you to Waco?" This kind of blank stare, sometimes they look at each other look back at me. Shrug – "We don't really know. We sense that God wanted us to be apart of what He is doing at Harris Creek." Ok. Let me tell you again in case you were sleeping. Nearly every Sunday someone comes up and tells me they moved here to find a job here because they wanted to be a part of what God is doing here. That's not normal.

You know what else is not normal? Miracles. If they were normal, they would be called normacles. But they are called miracles because they are not normal. They show you that God is doing an extraordinary work. Do you know what happened in this room here Monday night? We had membership class in here Monday night. 380 people came on Monday night and said I want to be a part of the church. Now if that doesn't blow your mind, okay, more than 50% - more than half of the churches in the United States of America are under 100 people. Okay? 20% under 50 people. That means that if you take our membership class and you divided them up in thirds – into three groups. Each of those groups would be larger than most of the churches in America. That's crazy!

Now some of you, you are put off by that a little bit. You think, oh gosh he's boasting. I want you to know something. I absolutely am! I am boasting in the sovereign kindness and grace of our God that He would move in that way. Because listen, we have an amazing staff. A very gifted staff, but it's not them. It's not me. It's God showing off. And the reason people are moving here and want to be apart of it is because people want to be apart of what God is doing. And I just have this deep sense in my soul, in my spirit that God is doing unique work here. We may stand before Jesus one day. And we may look back on this day and He may tell you, that's when I was the most at work in your life. That's when you were right smack in the middle of a powerful movement of my Spirit. Don't take it for granted friends. It's not normal. There should be a sense of awe inside of us.

And I've let you down. I have not done a good job of celebrating those things. Maybe because of my own insecurities. Or just a moving fast in the midst of that. And I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me? I want to do a better job of celebrating what God is doing here. In fact, we are bringing someone on staff and one of their primary focuses will be to capture those stories. In fact, if you moved here to be a part of what God is doing at Harris Creek will you e-mail us?

[hello@harris creek.org](mailto:hello@harris creek.org) Will you let us know? We would love to talk to you more about it. Even if you told me before, would you please reach out to us. We would love to know who you are.

And when you gather with your Life Group make sure you make some time and space to celebrate what God is doing. Alright? Just to say, “hey, this is what God did this week”.

**Verse 45 – they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.**

## 7. Generosity

The seventh thing that marked the first church is generosity. Okay? This is not socialism. It’s generosity. It’s not government mandated; it’s biblically mandated for the church to care for the church. I know that sometimes we meet somebody, and we think we need to be the church to them. Sometimes the greatest thing you can do for someone in need is to pull them into the church. Either your church or a church near them. If the church did its job, there would be no need for para church ministry. Now, the church has not done its job so I’m extremely thankful, extremely thankful for para church ministries. But you need to know that as long as you are a part of this church, you will never go hungry as long as one of us has a loaf of bread. And as long as you’re a part of this church, you will never sleep on the street as long as one of us has an empty bed. Because we are going to care for each other’s needs. That’s what you see here in this verse.

I have a friend who they are re-doing their house. Redoing their kitchen and they’ve really been looking forward to it. And I love that stuff. So just, design and whatnot. Like Fixer Upper, I’m crazy about it. And so, he and I were talking about this. And we were close friends and so we were kind of talking and I was like “yeah, you should blow out this wall and what if you moved this here. And just thinking through those things.” And so, you know, single income, kids, not a lot of money. They saved over time \$35,000 to do this home renovation. And it was all the money they had outside of what they need to live on. No rich uncle, nothing else in the picture. And so, we are talking though this, I’m excited for them. They are really excited.

And we taught that generosity message – Nate did a great job in Philippians teaching on generosity. And I came up behind him and just said you know we have some debt here and our debt is all of our debt and I feel that we feel that as a family. And after that sermon, he sat down with me and he said, “I want to ask you some questions about that.” And so, he got really in the weeds. He was like “What’s your interest weight? The terms of the loan? How much do you have on hand? What are you running at? What’s your budget, annual budget? What was it last year?” And he just started asking all these questions. He’s kind of heady like that, knows numbers. And just really got in the weeds on that.

And so, then a week later, we are together, and I just said “Man, how’s the kitchen? Are you about to break ground on that?” And he goes, “No, we changed course”. And I said, “What do you mean, what happened? Was it going to be more expensive?” He goes, “No man, once I understood the need of our church you know, I don’t know if I am supposed to tell you this, but we are close friends, so I went up there and dropped off a check for \$35,000.” And what I love about that, is that it was somebody really in the know, and they just got it. And it was convicting for me. I mean. We are like meeting with an architect and I’m like let me cancel today and reevaluate. And it stretched me, God used that in my life. And so, generosity marked the church. And I want you to know, I want to take a minute to celebrate with you guys how it marks this church.

So, let’s just have a family discussion really quick. Background, Harris Creek prior to me coming had two million dollars in debt and needed to build a building. They did a campaign called “Our Turn” where they raised two million dollars. They were able to pay off that debt, but it required six million dollars to do it. Very difficult to find funding for that. Except there is a bank in town that says, “Hey, we believe in the mission there. We believe in what God is doing there.” They said, “we will support it, or fund it.” And so, they gave us a loan and here are the details of that (details were on the screen).

That was this year: \$5,900,000 million dollars in debt with a 4.5% interest rate. Our monthly payment, \$37,000. In December, our budget is really big in December – end of the year. \$600,000 dollars – we stood up here, we communicated a need to you guys, and you gave \$1.2 million dollars in December. That’s amazing, you should clap! Because of your generosity throughout the year, it gave us a surplus of \$2.5 million dollars. We were able to take that surplus and apply it to debt reduction. To that loan, right? But then what happened, is that bank reached out to us – unprompted – and said, “Hey, we want to lower your interest rate to 3.75”. I don’t know how long you’ve been around banks, but that’s not common practice. You know? No refinancing, nothing we are just going to lower you interest rate. Which saves us \$400 in interest a day – a day! Alright?

And so, we are on track to do something really incredible. Because I stood up here, and I said “do you know what we could do if...” see debts not sin, it’s not wrong, its not bad – it is limiting. And I stood up here and I said, “Do you know what we could do if we didn’t have it? We could plant churches; we could focus on external missions; we could focus on local missions; we could start economic development. Grabbing business leaders; bringing them in; building businesses; giving people jobs; changing a community. We could start a residency program sending pastors around the world. All of these things I want to do. And you guys misheard me, because I checked my e-mail the next day and I had all of these e-mails from all of these people saying I want to do that, I want in on that. And I think I miscommunicated because it is IF we were able

to break free from this. Then we could continue to focus on what does it look like to build a program here that sends missionaries throughout the world. Right?

And so, that's what we are on track to doing! Before I move forward, I just want to applaud you guys. Can we just thank God for your generosity? The way that you guys have given. There is an expectation that when you gather in your Life Group you are talking about these things. You know? That there is some exposure to how you spend and save and give. I had someone tell me years ago that I would rather show up naked to Life Group than talk about money. And I just said, "that's because it has a grip on your heart." I heard someone else say once that we don't really talk about our stuff. Life Group is not our thing. Then I would say, "You have not subscribed to biblical Christianity." Read this book and tell me what you are supposed to keep to yourself. Like I said before, I will be up here afterwards. Any verse, anything the Scripture says that you should really just keep to yourself. Not let people in on. I'd be happy to talk about.

### **Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. Praising God...**

#### 8. *Worship*

Worship marked the first church. This is celebrating, it's not celebrating just what God has done it's celebrating who He is. I want people in my life that remind me who God is. His character -El Shaddai, Jehovah Jireh, Jehovah Nissi, Yahweh, I Am, Jesus, God of Mercy, God of Strength, My Rock, My Redeemer. Right? I want somebody to remind me who God is. I love Drew Greenway, I love Rebecca Harris, I love the way that God uses them to stir my affections for who He is. And a part of you gathering in your Life Group should be like, "hey, be reminded of who God is". People need hope – today more than ever maybe in your lifetime. They need hope! This who God is this is who we worship!

And it's not just songs, right? Romans 12:1-2 – present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. To live as a sacrifice to God, here is my life! And enjoin the favor of all the people. Enjoin – to put joy in.

#### 9. *Joy*

Joy marked the first church. Life Group is hard. Just because it is challenging doesn't mean you are doing it wrong. But through Life Group – through community – I've experienced real relationships. I've been in the world a lot. So, I've had shallow relationships. But do you know how real relationships are found? Do you know how real relationships are found? Do you know how real relationships are found? They are not found – they are forged. Okay? They are forged through hurt, they are forged through pain, they are forged through heartache, they are forged

through reconciliation, they are forged through conflict. They are forged through we don't get along.

I wrote a dear friend this week, in his birthday card, and I just said "what you and I have is deeper than that tailgate 'I love you man' you know sunsetting on your way home – I love you man. What we have is real because it has been forged through heartache and pain and experience and life." And there have been times that we did not want to be friends. But the Holy Spirit is stronger than that. And so, you are not going to find Life Group, it's going to be forged through time. And whenever you don't want to go, and you don't want to be friend with them, and you feel like you have nothing in common with them – that's when you know you are doing it right. Push through that. Push through that.

**And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

#### 10. *Conversions*

People were being saved. People are being saved. Every week I talk to someone who placed their faith in Jesus. I got emotional up here – was it Friday night – Friday night? Talking to our high schoolers with our students with my friend Derek. Just watching kids give their whole life to Jesus. And it messed me up man, in the best kind of way. In the best kind of way. And so, Jesus recruited people who recruit people. We want to be disciples who make disciples. The measure of success for us here is faithfulness and life change that comes through that faithfulness. We want to be a mature church.

But here is what you need to know about the mature church, friends. It is always marked by immaturity. Do you understand what I mean by that? Anytime you have large, huge sequoia trees on the ground you have little seedlings. Any time you have a mature animal of any kind, you have little immature animals running around it. Any time there is a mature church, mature followers of Jesus Christ, there are going to be baby Christians that surround them. People that don't know what to wear, people that don't know how to talk, people that don't know how much they can drink, right? They don't know how to date. They don't know how to be married. But they have Jesus, and they are starting somewhere, and they have you to show them. And that is the mark of the mature church.

And so, in choosing a church, you are really choosing what problems you want to live with. There is no perfect church here. If you find a perfect church don't go there, you will ruin it. Some of you are like I want a church that goes all over the world! We are not there. We will get there; we are on our way there. We are not there yet. I want a church with an amazing external focus ministry. I'd say there, we are taking some real ground. We are getting there. Even last week we've taken significant ground on being better at being on mission in Waco. I want a

church that give millions away to other ministries. Not that church. We will be that church, but right now we have to focus on debt service and the opportunities before us and getting to that place. That's the truth. I want a church that doesn't take Scripture to seriously. You are in the wrong place! Keep looking. And you are looking for the wrong thing. We are going to hold firm to the Scriptures. That's what we are going to do.

And so, if you looked at the first church, and you peeked in the window. What you would write down is they were devoted, they were teaching, there was fellowship, communion, prayer, awe, generosity, worship, joy, and conversions. That's what you would see if you looked at the window. And so here this week, Instagram has this great feature where we can just ask you a question and you can answer it. So, we just asked you the question, when you think of Harris Creek what word comes to mind? And so, some of you wrote words down and I just documented exactly what you wrote down. In fact, didn't have to omit any except for one that didn't make sense.

And so here is what you wrote down, I'm going to give it to you. That we are a church that is accepting, alive, authentic, awesome, battleship, biblical, bold, bracing, challenging, church, community-centered, consistent, devoted, different, dynamic, edifying, equipping, eye-opening, faithful, family, genuine, goals, gospel-focused, grace-filled, heaven, heart, helpful, home, honest, impactful, inclusive, innovative, inspirational, inspiring, intentional, inviting, love, loving, missional, obedient, passionate, positive, powerful, prayerful, purposeful, real, realistic, safe-haven, steadfast, trailblazing, transformative, truthful, unapologetic, and welcoming. At this church. That's this church.

That when you look through the window, I pray that you would see Jesus. That we would exalt Him up and the adjectives that you would use to describe this place, would be the same adjectives that you would use to describe our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But what happens if I show up Wednesday night and I look through the window and I see you in your living room with your Life Group. What adjectives am I going to write down? What would someone write down there? How are you doing at being the church, at living these things out? Heeding these values.

So, I'm just going to pray for you that we would do well there.

Father, we thank You for Your Word it doesn't return void. Thank you for – You didn't have to – but through Luke You documented this picture of the first church gathering. And we are able to look through the window and we are able to see what Your Holy Spirit is doing. So, Father we are thankful, and I am thankful for the work that You are doing here. The way that these words mark us. Authenticity, Biblical, Community-Centered, Devoted, Grace-filled, Innovative, Missional, Prayerful. May that continue to be values that we heed in our Life Group and even here Sunday morning. Father, I pray that You would pull us deeper into a relationship with You

even as we move towards singing a song. That we would move into deeper relationship with You. So, God, we love You and we reflect on the Gospel – the good news – of Your Son Jesus Christ now.

Amen.