

Find Your People



Bro. Kory Cunningham
John 13:31-35

If you have your Bibles, go to John 13. We are going to be there in just a moment, but before we get there I want to tell you a story about a guy named Dennis. Some of you may know Dennis Wood because he's the team leader of our safety team. He and his wife Jo moved here from Decatur, Illinois, and just prior to moving he had retired from being a police officer. About a year or so before they moved here, they came to know the Lord so they became followers of Jesus. And as they got ready to start their new life of retirement and their next phase of life for him and Jo, they moved here and they knew they needed to find a church. They told me they went to eight different churches, filled out visitor cards at eight different places, and they heard back from zero. So they were a little discouraged because they were trying to get connected and find a place, and no one was contacting them so they could figure out how to get into their church. Well, it just so happened on a Tuesday they were driving by on 641 and they see this church. They pulled in and our ladies were meeting for their Precept Bible Study, and my wife, Katie, just happened to be in the foyer. Remember, our offices are not here they're actually downtown. So, he comes in and says, "Hey, I would love to know about your church." So she gets to tell him a little bit. She says, "How would you like to follow me to the office? They can really help you with all of the information that you need to know." He says, "Sure." So she gets in her car, he gets in his truck, and they go down to the office. Katie leads him in

there and says, "Hey, I want you to meet Sydney and Mrs. Lilly," which are like two of the best ladies to meet, ever. So, he meets them and they begin to tell him everything about our church—how to get involved and all the different things. He goes home, meets his neighbor for the first time, and his neighbor says, "Hey, do you go to church anywhere? I go to Hardin Baptist Church. Would you like to come with me?" He says, "Yeah, sounds good." So he comes to church that next Sunday and as he comes into this place, which is obviously a big place, he meets a guy in the foyer named Wayne Ross who happens to be one of our Sunday school teachers. Wayne says, "Hey, are you new? I would like for you to come into my Sunday school class," so Dennis and Jo go into Wayne Ross' Sunday school class. So all of a sudden, they were around a whole lot of people, but now they're in a room with just a few people, like 10 or 15, and they can get to know them, figure out who they are, learn names, and get to know faces. So during that first experience, they get in a Sunday school class and they begin to meet some people in the church. Not long after that, they get to meet Brother Ricky in the foyer. They say, "Hey, we want to be members," because they had loved the connections so far. So he tells them about the membership series, which leads them to a meeting with about membership where we talk about their giftedness. He says, "Well, you know, I'm a retired police officer." I say, "Well, we have a security team," which is what we called it at the time. He says, "Well, I'm interested in that."

So long story short, about a year later, he is the head of our safety team right now. But in that connection, in trying to get to that, he starts meeting a few other people; for instance, Scott. He meets Scott while working with his security and Scott finds out that Jo, his wife, does technology. So they recruit Jo to work up in the booth. She's one of the people who clicks through the slides and makes sure the lights are working for us. Jo is also in Wayne Ross' Sunday school class, but it's not just a Sunday school class. These ladies meet once a month together to pray and encourage one another. They do ministry together. They go reach out to people together. Jo says, "Man, these are my people! It's unbelievable how connected I am to them." So Dennis decides he wants some discipleship too. He connects with Bill Sanders and he meets on Sunday nights for a discipleship group in

our Hardin Men's Ministry where he is deeply connected to these men and has community, care, and all of the things he needs. I tell you this to say that these people moved from Illinois to Kentucky with zero family, zero friends, and zero connection. Then all of a sudden they find a place that because of you guys, because of your generosity, you inviting them, and you caring for them, they have now found their people and they will tell you that there is no doubt in their mind that God moved them to this place for this season in their lives so that they could be a part of a body of Christ like this because they have found family. They're not just individual followers of Jesus who download a sermon once a week. They're a part of a family who has deep relationships and connections within this body. And guess what? They're caring for others and others are caring for them.

See, they're here without family, but in reality, they have a whole, big family and they have a whole lot of people who are deeply invested in them, and that is what we're going to talk about this morning. We're in this series called "We Are Sent" and we say that every week, but we decided to actually tell you what that actually means. So, what does it mean that we are sent? Well, first we have to think about the "we." Who are "we"? We are a local church and what we do as a local church is gather, connect, and serve. Then we're going to give and go- that's the "sent" part. Last week we talked about gathering and the importance of you being here to worship God, to sing together, and to hear the preached Word of God together. That's really important! It's really important that you gather weekly for corporate worship. But then also, as you gather, we want to next connect. We want to find our people. We want to do what the Bible says- to one another, one another. The Bible is replete with one another commands and we are going to read several of them in just a moment, but we are commanded to one another, one another. We're commanded to love one another, but here is our conviction. We can't one another, one another if we don't know one another, and that's the big idea this morning. And I have news for you—just look around for a moment. Just turn your head and look around this room. There is probably close to 400 people in this room. So, you're thinking...*I've got to know 400 people so I can one another, one another? That's a lot of others in this room. I can barely take*

care of me! Well, the good news is that you do not have to one another ALL of the people in this room, but we do want you to find your people, your 10 or your 15, and we want you to love them relentlessly, to one another them relentlessly so that it would display who God is to a world that desperately needs God. So the question we're going to ask this morning is are you connected to our church? Have you found your people? Have you found that group that you're connected to, you're living gospel community with, you're pursuing the Lord Jesus together, you've got deep friendships, and you're going together? Have you found that group? If not, we're going to tell you exactly how to do that this morning. Let's go to John chapter 13 as we try to figure out if this is even something that we should or must do. Now, this is after Jesus washes the disciples' feet. The Lord's supper is happening and the cross is on the horizon.

Scripture

"When he had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'"

In verse 31, Jesus says the Son of Man is now going to be glorified and God is going to be glorified in him. He said he's going somewhere they can't go, they cannot follow him, and he's alluding to the cross. He is showing them that he's going to die, he's going to be put in a tomb, he's going to rise from the dead, and in this event God is going to be glorified. God is going to be made much of. People will see the cross and they will see the glory of God in Christ. So it's all about the glory of God. Then he switches. Right after saying in the cross he is going to glorify God and God is going to be glorified in him, he switches gears to talk about us. He says I'm leaving. I'm getting ready to die, rise from the grave, and go back to

heaven. When I go, I have a new commandment that I'm going to leave with you.

Now we will go to the next set of verses. What is the new commandment that he's leaving to us? The new commandment is that you love one another. So, Jesus is going. He's going to die, raise again, and go to heaven. He says to his disciples...*Hey, the Christian life, becoming my disciple; it's not just about following me, downloading a sermon, and doing your own life. It's about loving the family of God. You're a part of a family, a kingdom, and a body and what I want you to do when I'm gone is to love one another.* Notice, he doesn't say just put up with one another, or just be nice to everybody. That's kind of easy. If the command was that everybody in this room be nice to everybody then we could just smile and say, "Hey, do you want to go to get a donut first?" Good, then we've fulfilled the command...but that's not the command. It's not just be nice to people. It's LOVE one another. It's to care about them, to know them, to know their needs, to meet their needs, to show up when they need you, and to have people show up when you have needs. So the new command is to love one another and what we're trying to say is that you can't love one another unless you know one another. You can't love somebody if you don't know them and that includes finding your people. But notice the example Jesus leaves us with. Just look back down in the text. He says, "love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." He defines his love. It's a love like Jesus loves. How does Jesus love? He laid down his life for us. He gave his life up. It is a sacrificial, everything I have to love you, kind of love. So Jesus is our great example in this love. We're supposed to love each other, the people in this congregation, you're supposed to love them like Jesus loved you. That requires something. He's asking of you to show up for people and love them well.

Not only are we supposed to love people like Jesus, but as we do so we are actually going to show the world who God is. Notice with me in verse 35, "By this..." By what? It's by the way we love each other. "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." So by the way that you love each other, by the way you show up

for each other, and by the way you treat each other like I've treated you, people will know that you are my disciple. In other words, the world will see God by the way we love each other.

I don't know if you've noticed, but the world is lacking love. Everybody is mad at each other, we're yelling at each other, and we don't have a lot of loving each other. Do you know what would be nice for the world to see? A group of people that relentlessly love each other. It would show them the gospel! It would show them who God is. And I think that is what John says in 1 John. The way we love actually shows the world who God is. Look at these texts from 1 John. We will read three of them. It says this in chapter 3, verse 11, "For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." At the beginning of your Christian faith, do you remember what you were taught? And who taught that? Jesus! Jesus said love one another. Now we're commanded to love one another and we are actually taught from the Old Testament to love God and love each other. So this idea of loving one another has always been, but now it's heightened since Jesus came.

1 John chapter 4, verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." If you've been loved by God, it should translate into you now loving the people in this congregation. You now love each other the way God has loved you. Then, I love this in verse 12, "No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." I've always loved that sentence. I've always loved that thought. John first says no one has ever seen God. God is invisible, but then he says, "...if we love one another, God abides in us." So what is he trying to say there? Why does he start with saying you cannot see God and that God is invisible but then he says, "if we?" I think that "if we" is saying that if we do something, we can actually show the world a God that they cannot see. And what is it? If we love one another. If we love one another, guess what? God abides in us and God's love is perfected in us. So, we, by the way we love each other, can actually show the world a God they can't see. God is invisible so we can't say...*Hey, worship our God, here he is.* But do you know what we can do? We can love each other well, we can serve

each other well, and we can show the world a God we can't see by the way we love each other.

Hopefully you're picking up this idea that loving one another is a big deal. And it's not just loving one another, but in the Bible, there are all kinds of one anothers. You can do a Google search and there will be anywhere from 50-100 commands in the Bible. So I'm going to give you around six of them to show this idea of how we are supposed to one another, one another. Again, you can't one another, one another if you don't know one another. We have to know one another to one another, one another. Now let's look through a few verses.

Romans chapter 12 says this, "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." So again, it's this one another language. We are supposed to be loving one another and we're showing honor to one another.

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Colossians 3:13 "bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

Romans 12:16 "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."

James 5:16 "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working."

So that is just six of the more than 50 plus one anothers in the Bible. The New Testament writers got this idea that Jesus was really serious about loving one another. He said that was the way we show the world that we follow Jesus and that's the way the world sees God. An unseen God can be seen by the way we love one another so we better get these one anothers right.

Notice Romans says to live in harmony with one another. All of these one anothers require another. You can't do these by yourself. You don't have to be commanded to live in harmony with yourself. You do what you do. It's when you're with another human being and they have different desires, different opinions, and different thoughts. It can get irritating and that's when you have to live in harmony, right? Forgiveness is easy when it's just you because you're always right, you never do anything wrong, and you're perfect, right? But when you get around somebody else, you mess up, they mess up, and now there is friction and tension. You're always yourself because you're great, but when you're with somebody else, you have to be kind because they're not great. It's hard with people and that's why there are commands to one another, one another. These commands are not natural and they're not easy, but they're commanded because we have the Holy Spirit within us who allows us, enables us to love like this among one another. And if we do it right, if we get around a group of people and we one another them- we show up, we forgive, we bear their burdens, we confess our sins, we pray for one another, and we do God's business together- then God's love is displayed and people can see we are following Jesus and they can see a God who they can't see. That is what is at stake with this idea of connection. It's not that once you connect you have a few more friends. We do want that to happen, but we want you to connect because this is deeply biblical. This is gospel language. We are commanded to connect together so that we can show the world who Jesus is. Guess what? You need people and people need you, so we're trying to get you to find your people.

The early church knew the importance of this idea of one anothering one another and this idea of fellowshiping. Notice what it says in Acts 2, "And

they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Notice, they were devoted to the apostles' preaching. They devoted themselves to the gathering- we talked about that last week. They were devoted, but then there is the word, "and," "...*and* the fellowship." They were also devoted to the idea of fellowship. They would scatter, meet in homes, and meet in smaller groups. They wouldn't know everybody at the temple, but they would come and know the ten or fifteen at their house and they would devote themselves. Now, they say devote and I don't know about you, but that doesn't seem casual to me. The word, devote, sounds like it's going to cost you a little bit. It's going to be uncomfortable. It's going to cost you time and comfort. You might have to sweep the house or show up and spend another hour on Sunday. There is cost associated with devotion, but they were devoted to the fellowship. Why? Because they knew one another, one another mattered. Because by the way they love one another is the way the world will see Jesus and the way they grow into godliness. So the early church was devoted to the fellowship.

At Hardin, we call that finding your people. We want you to connect. We want you to find your people, as Drew Holcomb says. So if you go out to the green wall you will see a big sign that says, "Find your people." We've said that for two or three years- find your people. Every time you walk out you see "Find your people" and you think what exactly does that mean? We want to help you unpack what that means right now. Hopefully we will be crystal clear about what finding your people means, why you should do it, what it looks like, and also how to do it. So let's start first with the reality of our church. You are not going to a church with 30 people where you can know everybody, and it's not our goal to get back down to 30. It's not our goal to shrink- that would make my job easier- but we are actually hoping to go the other direction. We actually want to grow because more people get to know Jesus, get connected to him, and get life in his name that way. That is where we're going. So, if you wish we were smaller, we actually wish we were bigger because we want more people to know about Jesus. The reality is on any Sunday there are about 1,000 people who will come in and out of our services. Now, you know that church attendance is

not always super consistent because a lot of you probably weren't here last week because you were travelling or going somewhere. You, yourself probably come two to three times a month. So, if you look at the 1,000 people that come every week it's really closer to 1,500 people that come in and out throughout the year to our church when you add those who are watching online as well. So, now we are commanding you to love one another, to forgive, pray, bear burdens, share, live life, and be in community with over 1500 people. Let's just be very honest. That is impossible. Some of you are panicked right now because you don't know everybody's name in this room. You're thinking...*man, in my old church I knew everybody's name and I don't know everybody's name here!* Guess what? I don't either and I'm supposed to! There are a lot of us! There are a lot of faces! You don't have to know one another every single person in this room. You can't; it's impossible. You can't know one another 1,000 people. But do you know what you can do? You can know one another 10. You can't do 1,000, but you can do 10. You can do 15. You can do 20. You can do that smaller number of people.

So, here is our conviction. If we're going to know one another, one another then we have to know one another because you can't know one another, one another if you don't know one another. We have to actually connect. We have to go into some form of connection so that we get to know some people, and in knowing them we can love them, pray for them, bear them, encourage them, stir them, and do all of those one anothers with that group of people. That's why at Hardin we say we want you to find your people. That doesn't mean all of us; that means you find YOUR group, YOUR circle, the people that you're going to know their names and they're going to know your name. So if you don't show up, they call you, or if they don't show up then you call them. It's that kind of thing. That is who your people are. It's the kind of thing that when something happens you text them and when something happens they text you. That is what finding your people means.

Now, you might ask, why exactly do I need to connect? Why should I even do this? Well, for one, you have a human need to connect. That is why Facebook and TikTok exist. You need other human beings. You're not made

to be alone; you need some other connection. You, as a human, were made for connection. Just imagine if we believed that there is an animal that needs other animals. For instance, a chimpanzee needs other chimpanzees. Then imagine we just put him in a cage and put video screens in there showing other chimpanzees playing with balls and making cute videos. That would suffice, right? We would all probably say that would be a miserable life for that chimpanzee to just have videos of other chimpanzees. Yet with a lot of us, the only communication and interaction we have as social creatures is looking at a screen. We are in our house, isolated, and don't know anybody, but we're watching these other humans do other things. That's not what we were made for! We were made for deep community together with genuine friendship.

So it is a human need, but it is also a cultural need. National Public Radio came up with a headline that said America has a loneliness epidemic. We're in an epidemic right now of loneliness because we change jobs, we change locations, and technology has disrupted all of our lives. We have an epidemic of loneliness. The New York Times came up with a headline that said American men are in a friendship recession. Basically, men have almost zero friendship now. We're isolated, we're unconnected, and we don't know people. So there is a real human and cultural need for why you should connect here at Hardin Baptist Church for meaningful friendship and community, but also it is a biblical requirement. God wants you to connect. He has commanded us to love one another.

There are also great benefits to connection. When you connect, you gain community, care, encouragement, and growth. All four of those things happen if you connect. If you go through something and I find out about it then I'm probably going to text you, call you, or maybe come over and just be with you and pray with you through that. That is one of my jobs. But if you're connected with a Sunday school class or a small group, when I call you, do you know what you're going to talk to me about? The outrageous care you've already received. It happens every single time! If you're connected to somebody, it's crazy. If you're in a Precept group, a men's group, a Sunday school class, or one of those places of connection, then

you usually say, "Man, you're not going to believe this...I've got this meal train." Or, so and so came by and they took me here. It's unbelievable the amount of care that you receive if you're in a group. If you have found your people, when you go through something they will be there for you and I can say that because I've seen it time and time and time again. If you're in community, you get outrageous care. If you're outside of community, then I'm not sure what's going to happen. I'm just being honest; you might get a text and a call and that's about it because there are like 1500 of you. But if you're connected to that group then you're going to get outrageous care, crazy care! It's wild! Some of you are nodding your head and thinking *I've been there; it's crazy! I've gone through something and you wouldn't believe the people who showed up, called, and came.* And it's because you were connected to other people in our church. The connected receive outrageous care and it's one of the absolute beauties of being one of the pastors getting to see our body work. You guys are phenomenal at caring for one another, but you have to be connected to receive that care.

You also get community, you get friendship, and you get encouragement. They're going to push you in your walk with Jesus. You get growth. You're going to grow just because with other humans, guess what? You have to forgive, you have to bear, you have to pray, and you have to know more than just yourself. You're going to grow in Jesus because you're around his people and you're around the family of God. I cannot speak highly enough on the benefits of connection.

So, let's just get to the practical part. How do you connect? How do you connect at Hardin Baptist Church? Well, I think for one there is organic connection and then there is structured connection. Organic means you just be a human. I tell my kids that a lot. Just be a human. You just know what to do. For example, we have coffee and donuts outside of the foyer. If you don't know a soul in this church, just go grab a donut, grab a cup of coffee, and just look around and look for the other person that is just standing there not knowing anybody. Go and stand by them and say, "Hey, I see you're standing here. I'm standing here. Do you want to stand

together? Let's just drink coffee and stand together." "Hey, are you coming next week? We can do this again next week." I guarantee if you stand there with that person for three or four week it'll be a friendship (or I don't know, maybe end up in marriage!) but you'll get connected to somebody at this church. It doesn't have to be a scenario where you text this number and go to this wall to meet other people. You can also connect on your own as a human. You could also just start a conversation in the sanctuary, "Hey, you've sat in my row every single Sunday for five years and I don't know you. What's your name? Would you like to also sit at a restaurant at some point with my family?" You can have organic friendship in the body of Christ and the more you do that the more your life will be enriched and I promise you will benefit from just knowing the people you sit around and the people you brush by in the foyer. Do you know one of the best organic ways to get somebody else connected? If you are in a connection group, if you have found connection, be an evangelist for connection. For example...*Hey, my name is Kory. What is your name? Are you connected in any way at Hardin?* When they say no you can say...*Oh, great! I'm in a men's group. Do you want to meet with me for breakfast on Wednesday mornings? You should come and join my group. I'll text you on Tuesday.* If you invite somebody in, they're probably going to come if they're not connected. A lot of you are connected because somebody invited you into something. So you could invite somebody in; that is an organic way. Just act like a human, have some interactions, and try to get someone to be in your place of connection.

Now, let's talk about the more structured way, or the formal way, to connect at Hardin. We really have three main ways to connect and that is Sunday school, small groups, and discipleships groups, and I want to spend some time talking about all of these things. This is where the sermon gets really fun and exciting, but hopefully, if you like structure and you're really curious about these things, then you'll be interested in the differences of Sunday school, small groups, and discipleship groups. So Sunday school, I know it's going to shock you, but it happens on Sundays. Crazy, right? It's also kind of like school, meaning it is a lecture style teaching environment. So, if you come into a Sunday school class then there is going to be a

teacher who is going to stand behind a podium and teach you a lesson from the Bible. But also, in that lecture style environment it's not exactly like worship service because there is going to be a lot of time to talk, pray, hang out together, and get to know one another. So it's also about community and care. You will get to know people. You will find your people if you join a Sunday school class and stay with it long enough. Again, if you're in a Sunday school class you'll receive outrageous care and you'll get to care for people in outrageous ways. It is fantastic! The friendships, the things they do together, and how they go together, there is a lot that happens outside of that Sunday school class, but it's on Sunday mornings. We have three different hours. We have 7:50, 9:15, and 10:40. We have an array of Sunday school classes.

For instance, Joey Adair has a class that meets right before this service. So, if you get up just a little bit earlier you could come to his Sunday school class. We have classes for various ages and stages of life. For instance, we just opened up a new Sunday school class, and really it's a new ministry, that meets at 10:40 up in the high school room. We're calling it Hardin Twenties. So, guess what? It's for people at Hardin that are in their twenties. We've tried to make it as easy as possible! So if you're 25, here is where you go! Trevor Grant is heading up Hardin Twenties so if you're not connected and you're in your twenties go to that and I promise you'll get outrageous connection, you'll get some supper groups, and all sorts of cool things that they're doing. That's Trevor's Sunday school class, the Hardin Twenties, but there are a lot of others and I'll give you a little bit of the buffet. Brady Siress is teaching through Matthew. David Joseph is going through Hebrews. Jackson Greer is teaching church history. Tim Henson is teaching Romans, Randy Taylor is teaching Luke, and Trevor is teaching 2nd Timothy. Chase leads Baptist Beliefs, Jason Billington leads GSP, and Jerry Washburn leads a recovery class on Monday nights. So that's just a few of them; that's not even all of them, but that is where you can find the lecture style teachings. We're going to be in Genesis for a year. Maybe you would like to study another book as well. Well, pick up a Sunday school class and you'll get to learn, get people, and receive care and community. So, that's one of the easiest places to start getting connected. If you haven't found

your people, I suggest going to a Sunday school class. At the green wall, you can find up brand new brochures with every single Sunday school class listed, what they're teaching, who they are, and what time they meet. So just go grab that as a first step to connection.

Secondly, we have small groups. Small groups are different because they're not lecture style teaching. They are discussion driven learning. Small groups discuss the sermon that was preached the previous week. Most of them meet on Wednesday nights, some of them meet on Sundays mornings, and some of them meet in houses throughout the community, but most of them are on Wednesday nights here at Hardin Baptist Church. If you would like to get involved in a small group then you can let us know and you can come on Wednesday from 6:00 pm to 7:15 pm. A cool thing about the small groups- I'll just give a little plug for small groups- most of them are potluck. So my job on Wednesday nights is to check on the small groups and what that means is I get my plate and I'll do appetizers here, first course here, second course here, third course here, and fourth course there. By the end of the night, I'm lying in my office so full. It's great! They do food and it's awesome, but the thing about those small groups is that they're more centered around the idea of community. You will get to know those people deeply. You'll hear their stories, their testimonies, what's going on in their lives, and you'll pray for them every single week. They're a lot smaller- like 10 to 20 people- so you'll hear from them, you'll know them, and they will become deep friends. About once a month, you'll get to do a community outreach with them. We do that at the Hardin House where we cook a meal for the Hardin community and share the gospel with them. So outreach is also a part of those small groups as well. If that's appealing to you, we would love to multiply, grow, and add more. We will make room for you to join a small group.

The third way to find your people or connect is in a discipleship group. Now, discipleship groups are different because they are personal bible studies that are gender specific for accountability and friendship. We have a women's group called Rooted, which teaches Precept Bible studies, and they meet primarily on Tuesday mornings, Wednesday nights, and

Thursday mornings. There are a few other times, but those are the main ones. It's an inductive Bible study where you do your homework through the week, you engage God's Word, and then you meet up with a group of ladies and talk about the scriptures and all that God has done. But it's not just the scriptures; it is deep friendship. My wife has been in a Precept group for years. She has a text message group called, "The Precept Girls," and it's not even necessarily her current Precept group, but it's these friends she's got through Precept and they're her people. She texts them almost too much! I'm like, "Babe, I'm here. Could you turn the girls off and talk to me?" But if she's going through something, they're there. If they're going through something, she's there. It is outrageous care, community, and friendship because she's found her people. We have more than 130 women in these discipleship groups and they would love to add more. They would love to have you! Those kick off next week so you can call the church office and get all the information you want about those.

We also have men's groups called Hardin Men. Those meet primarily for breakfast before work at various times through the week. For instance, mine meets on Wednesdays at 6:30 am at Shaffer Coffee. Our men's groups are five to six men meeting together to push each other to read the Bible every day. That is our accountability piece, but then we watch a video teaching. We're dealing with biblical manhood right now. Then we have conversations about biblical manhood and we push each other to lean into biblical manhood. If you're a guy, there is a recession of friendship—as the New York Times says—guys don't have any friends. Well, guess what? We have over 100 men in Hardin Men groups and they are the best of friends. It is awesome! It is so great! I've got my guys and I've got my text group. They're my boys! They've got me and I've got them.

Have you found your people? Have you found that place of connection? We've got organic ways to connect. Some of you just have natural friendship in this church and you're doing community with those people. You're having meals with those people. They're coming over to your house and you're going to theirs. That is great! If you have that, you don't necessarily have to do one of these other things. But if you don't and

you're searching, then we have a real way for you to connect. We have Sunday school, we have small groups, and we have discipleship groups. We would love for you to connect to those.

I want to finish Dennis' story for you guys because it's not just that Dennis came and got really connected to our church. About six months ago, Dennis found out what no one wants to find out...he's got cancer. It was that news that turned his whole life upside down- all of his plans, all of the things that he and Jo had set aside, and they didn't know what to do. When he found out he might have cancer and there was all this testing that had to be run, and remember, Dennis is here with no family. Well, that's really not true; he's here with a massive family, his church family. He's here with the church family because he took a step of connection, he got connected, and he found his people. So when it was time for him to go to Cincinnati to have surgery, guess what? Robert Lowery, one of our greeters, took him. He drove him all the way to Cincinnati and spent 10 days with him just to care for him, encourage him, and drove him all the way back home. Jo was here on her own, but guess what? She hasn't been on her own because she's had outrageous care from the ladies in her Sunday school group. Other people were taking meals to her, caring for her, and meeting every need that she could possibly have. The last six months have been him receiving outrageous care. So, if you see Dennis just say, "Hey, Dennis, should I join the church and get connected?" Buckle up because you'll need about 30 minutes to be ready because he will tell you every reason why you need to get connected. He wanted me to tell you a whole lot more than I've already told you this morning, but that is his story. He found his people, and by finding his people, when the darkest moments in life came he wasn't alone. Guess what? Dennis has also been on the other side of that many times. He's been there. He showed up and he's been there for people because that's what being a Christian looks like. It's loving one another like Christ loved us.

Here's the reality, we can't love one another if we don't know one another. No, you can't know everyone here. You can't know 1,000 people, but you can know 10. So, the question is- have you found your 10? Have you found

your small place? Have you found that little group of connection? If not, then what about this morning? It's a new year. Everything is new. It's a new beginning. Right now, you take a step towards connection.

KT