



The Orange Series

Part 1 – It’s Just a Phase

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we launch a brand new series. It’s called *The Orange Series*. It will make more sense about halfway through the message. Today we are looking at *It’s Just a Phase*. On Tuesday, I sat down with the staff and drank from a fire hydrant from Stephanie Watson, Mesa Mitchell, and Mickey Pitman. They are passionate about our family ministry here at Woodland Hills. They’ve got the next three weeks. These are their three weeks to share with you about family ministry. So I was taking notes as fast as I could as they spoke. They came back from the Orange Conference in April. They are passionate about partnering with parents throughout every phase of your child’s development.

For almost ten years now, Stephanie Watson has been leading us in family ministry. She is being mentored by Reggie Joiner, with the reThink group, who is developing all of this great content. Your kids are taking part in this curriculum in WildWoods and Critter Street and our Student Ministry today. I have to tell you these folks wrote all of this content for you, so they did a great job preparing a sermon this week. I just got to take notes and organize it. These are what my notes typically look like for a Sunday, so I had to go buy all this stuff yesterday. I wanted to buy it on Saturday so it’s fresh and I can talk about each of the props. Before Saturday rolled around, Stephanie texted me a picture of this shirt that she just bought for me. This is how crazy they are all getting. They are now in charge of my wardrobe for the series. For one, it’s a fishing shirt, so, Tim Sainato, I feel so comfortable up here this morning. But this shirt serves three purposes. I’m going to teach in it this morning, direct traffic this afternoon, and fish in it tonight as the sun sets.

So I’ve got the shirt and I needed the props Saturday, so I headed to Target. Amy grabs a cart to go buy all the baskets and everything for the oranges and I start filling the cart with everything you see here. I’m reading my notes and my list and everything and I get all excited and I’m thinking of jokes. I get up to the checkout and I start to take stuff out and I realize *this ain’t my cart*. I have no idea whose full cart this is. I tell the checkout person it isn’t mine. I’m going to have to go put it back. She asks if I know where I got it. I said “Well, that’s probably the bigger problem here. I don’t know where I stole it from.”

Has anybody else ever done this? I had no clue, so I went on a great search trying to find my cart, realizing someone is going to punch me in the face as soon as they find me. I find my cart, so I drop this other cart off. But have you done the wandering thing? You leave a cart and you are two or three aisles over. Ladies you do this with your purses open and cash hanging out. I just put the cart in a random aisle, thinking somebody will find it; it won’t be a problem. I got out of there as quickly as I could with my cart. I bought everything and got in the car and no one knows it was me.

About two miles away from Target, I asked Amy if she had seen my notes. I'm talking about my notes that say The Orange Series at the top, Woodland Hills Family Church, August 16, 2015, Ted Cunningham. Does anybody know where those notes are? Yes, they were in the cart that I stole from someone at Target. So if you are here today as a result of our evangelism at Woodland Hills Family Church, we welcome you and we are glad that you are here.

We want to talk about these phases. I'm getting older; my kids know that. We've been living off of this line. Remember Psalm 90 where we looked at this big idea of how we have 70 years upon the earth; 80 if we're strong, and how those years are filled with sorrow and anguish. We looked at this big idea that the days go slow, but the years go fast. And all God's people said... Amen. Those are all the old people. Those are all the people that when they leave here today, they will be asked at a restaurant what they want to drink, and they are going to look at their watch. What they drink is based on the clock. After noon, it's no coffee. After 3:00, no tea. After 6:00, nothing. You can't do it or you will be up all night.

So the days go slow, but the years go fast and some of you are going *How did I get here?* Some of you parents are going *Where did the kids go? They marched through these phases so fast.* What we want to do is put a time line across all three screens of the phases from 0 – 12th grade, from 0 – 18 years old, from birth to them leaving your home. We want to walk through these phases and then we will look at the scripture to talk about the value that we place on children. The goal of this series is that you would develop a parenting plan. I'm not talking about a thick three ring binder, but a simple parenting plan for each of the phases of your child's development. Part of it is what is our church's role? What is our plan and strategy for coming alongside you and partnering with you as a parent? That's the simple goal of the next three weeks of our family ministry.

Embrace Phase: 0 – 5 years old

The first phase we want to look at is what we call the Embrace Phase; it's 0 – 5 years old. It's birth to right before kindergarten. The two primary goals of this phase are love and safety. We understand safety because we've all had one of these car seats that we've wrestled with to try to keep the kids safe. We strap them in like we're launching them into outer space in the car. We understand the safety, but we also understand the love. I think one of my favorite parts of this phase is after bath time. We wrap the kids in a towel when they are six months old and they get into that cuddle mode. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? It's at that moment that they feel everything about this phase. They feel the warmth, they feel the safety, and they feel the love. I love this phase. There are some of you who are going "Can we please get through this phase as quickly as possible?"

I remember the binky... I don't have these around my home a whole bunch anymore. Corynn used one until she was three years old. We were judged by parents. I didn't care. I think parents are way over the top today in almost every area. Whenever someone would look at me with disdain, I would say "This is why we have speech pathologists and orthodontists, so my child is going to continue to use this. My doctor says if she still wants this in kindergarten, we'll need to bring her in and we'll need to do some treatments, but up until that point, don't worry about it."

When Corynn was three, I told her “The day you throw this away, I’ll buy you a Barbie Jeep.” That’s a pretty good bribe. Don’t you think that’s a pretty good bribe? It didn’t work for her for months. She didn’t care; she wanted the binky.

I remember losing the binky one time in an airport as we went to Pennsylvania to visit my grandfather. I got into the car. I got her strapped into the rental car. I got a big Crown Victoria. We were going to pick up my grandfather at the nursing home. Corynn was two at the time and she asked for the binky. I didn’t have it and I didn’t have a spare one. I didn’t know what to do. She lost control. I had to go back through security and find it. It was on the floor. I had to then find the wipes and the antibacterial. You do this with your first child, not your second, third, or fourth. But with your first child, you want to make sure it’s clean. And it had been on a floor at an airport, so it had pee on it.

A few months after I bribed her, she went over to the garbage in our kitchen. She looked in it for a little while, looked at her binky, and then she dropped it in. It was a big moment in our house. We were entering a new phase. I will never forget Amy going to the garbage about five to ten minutes later and picking the binky out and it’s still in our dresser drawer at home. She’s now 12, but we’ve got the binky that we will bronze one day and put on a plaque.

Does anybody have a child that has binky and is just now beginning to talk? Are you Dad? I have a gift for you. Boy or girl? A girl. Your church would like to give you your first copy of Frozen. The joy that flooded my soul when I saw I could buy you the sing-a-long edition... You are going to be begging for this when you’re punching yourself in the face. So there you go: Frozen and a new binky. And you have a fishing shirt on. Way to go, buddy.

But then I remember the transition in this phase from diapers to the potty seat. If anything will ever make you doubt your salvation and your love for the Lord, it is this transition right here. I was with a friend Thursday night. They have six kids, three to fourteen years of age. He said “Ted, we’ve been in diapers for twelve straight years without one break. They are potty training their last child and it isn’t going well. When I bought this yesterday, Carson goes “What is that?”

I go “Let me tell you about this. It sat in there and as we tried to give you all autonomy, you would call out from the bathroom “Dad! Can you come wipe?” How many of you remember those days?

I remember thinking I will one day have my revenge. For one day, when I am old, I will visit your home and your family and I can’t wait to cry out from the bathroom “Carson! Come here, son. I need you to wipe.”

How many of you are in the diaper phase right now and I mean your children. Anybody? This size will handle up to 27 pounds. You won’t have to change for a couple of days there. That’s a good one right there. Could you use these? Up to 27 pounds. Here you go. I’m going to throw it to you. Does anybody need the potty seat? This is yours after the service. Those phases... That’s just the love and safety. We want to keep them alive and we want them to know they are cared for.

Engaged Phase: Kindergarten – 5th Grade

But then you move into the next phase. This is the kindergarten through 5th grade phase. This is the engaged phase. Parenting ain't for wimps, right? Parenting requires more and more work and the mistake we often make is "If I could just get through this phase, life would get easier." That's just not true. When you get through this phase, guess what? With each phase, I'm convinced you have to get more and more intentional. And it takes more and more work.

I have one in this phase right now. This is the play phase. This is the routine. Let's get some boundaries and some rules. I want fun. I want predictability, but I also want spontaneity. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? You begin to play games. You follow the rules. You set out rules. All of it is the context of play. The playful parent at the elementary stage... (I'll speak to the men for a second) This is where we want to be: an engaging dad, not an observing dad. When we go to the pool, we want to jump in with our kids, not just sit there and drink our Mountain Dew and watch them. This is where we make that decision.

We were in Florida two weeks ago and we went to that place where you can swim with the dolphins and swim in a reef with the kids and it's all man made. Amy doesn't know that the water is 75 degrees. I told her it was 25 degrees warmer than Taney Como, but 75 degrees is still cold for Amy. Our kids tease with her all the time. "Mom, we need to get you a wetsuit." She wants to swim in swimming pools with a wetsuit. She goes "Do you think that would look weird?" She can't stand being in any type of cold water.

So she gets to her ankles in this water and she stops. There is a big stingray that's swimming right up in front of her and the kids just come to life. We can touch them and play with them. Carson goes "Mom, Mom, Mom, look! Come on, get in." They kept telling her to get in and Amy won't get past her ankles. I'm standing out there going (and I speak for all the men in here) "If I can make it to my waist, you can get out here to your knees." Amy looks at Carson and goes "Go see that thing. You go. You do it." Then we had this great conversation about observing versus engaging.

Like a soldier, Mom and Dad, we do things we don't often want to do because we know it's in those moments that they are going to ask a question and we have this 30 to 60 second window that we are able to share.

Three years ago, I was in Rochester, Minnesota, at St. Mary's Hospital, as Amy's grandfather passed away. Our kids, seven and nine, were there to experience the whole thing. The most gentle and kindest of souls in the chaplain came in to begin to minister to our family. I learned so much by watching this chaplain. He started with Loraine who had just lost her husband of 65 years. He started to speak blessing over her. Then he started to share with her how to take care of herself during morning. It was just basic, simple stuff.

Then he looked over at me, noticed the seven and nine year olds hanging around me and he said "Dad, I need to share with you. They've experienced their first death. You think sitting down at a table and sharing with them at a restaurant is going to be where it takes place, but no. It's going to be when

you're on the floor playing with your kids." When you're engaging them, they will spin in the middle of playing Legos or in the middle of what I do often in my home... The Nerf gun is my life. These darts are how I live and breathe. They are everywhere. In the middle of a Nerf war, I get "Dad, what happened to Great Grandpa?" I've got 30 to 60 seconds. And because I've engaged, I can now play.

Is there a dad in here right now that has a son going into kindergarten? Maybe you are sending your first child off to kindergarten. Who is that all the way in the back? Is your wife with you? Here's what I want your wife to do... I'm going to give her a Lego set. You can't do this from 0 – 5 years old because they would swallow them. But now, I want to prepare you to deal with Legos. The best way to do it... After you fall asleep tonight, I want your wife to take this and I want her to sprinkle it on the floor around your bed. They are like little land mines all over the room. I'll give women childbirth, but after that, stepping on a Lego is about as bad as it gets.

Affirm Phase: 6th - 8th Grade

And then you go into the next phase. In fourth and fifth grade, you start to see this. A child's friends become more important than you. They're friends' opinions matter more to them, but, Mom and Dad, it's at that moment that you're voice matters most.

It's trial and error and right now, they are thinking about their identity. "Who am I?" "Who likes me?" "Who do I like?" This is a tender moment. This is a moment of a lot of mistakes, saying the wrong thing and doing the wrong thing. We embrace this phase. We not only accept this phase, we want to make the most of this phase.

We had been on a trip for like eight or nine days. Corynn and I are very much alike. You usually rub with the one you are most like. Corynn and I had a moment of disagreement that turned into conflict and then it got a little cold. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? I was not giving in and she was not giving in. I like to think *Well, I have a much louder voice than you do. You may have way more words than me, but I have a louder voice than you.*

For about an hour or two, we were cold and distant towards each other. Then Amy kind of called a meeting together, but she was really talking to me. She said "I need you to be the adult in the situation" and she was dead on. She prayed conviction of the Holy Spirit on me and I knew it. So at dinner, there were about 12 people gathered around this little table. I just leaned over to her and said "Corynn, you get your picture of God from me. Today, I gave you a poor picture of your heavenly Father. Will you forgive me?" She said yes.

Now men like to think it's over at that point. I just apologized; this deal is done. And with your boy, it's like "Awesome, Dad, let's go shoot." That's how it would work with Carson. With Corynn, it took a while. I can always tell by touch. I put my hand on her shoulder and she moves away. It took some time, but I understand. I want my daughter to get her standard of beauty from me. I want to be the one telling my daughter she is beautiful. I want to be the one explaining to her... This is what's hard as parents. She is leaning more towards her friends than me, but this is when your voice matters the most.

Corynn had a birthday party Friday and she had six of her friends over, so there were seven, twelve year old girls. They were sitting there having cake and opening presents. I thought it was a good moment. I'm going to share a little bit with them. I don't know of a better time; they are all gathered. So I said "Girls, I would like to talk to you about boys." Everybody wants to listen to an old man talk about boys, right? They were in tune.

I said "What are you going to say this year? The boys are going to start noticing; they've already started noticing and they are looking. They have their eyes on you and they are going to say things like 'I love you.'" I had to ask what the term is. Is it going out, going steady...? They explained it to me. I said, "I just want you to know when they say 'I love you,' they are of their father the devil and a child of darkness. I want you stay away from them." No, I didn't say that. But we had an honest conversation.

Dad, is she getting her standards from those kids at school or is she getting them from you. What is the constant message that you are sending to your children? They are going to be in this phase... this is a tough phase. This can be an awkward phase. Parents, this is when we embrace this phase.

Mobilize Phase: 9th – 12th Grade

Now you are preparing them to leave. They are not with you but for a few more years. For most of you who have students 9th – 12th you are a coach now. You are in the role of coach. You are preparing them to go experience the world. This is about belong or believe. They are asking... "Where do I fit in?" "Is everything my parents taught me, is all that information they gave me: their worldview, their faith, is that now going to be mine?" "Am I going to receive this?" "Am I going to accept it?" "I have a lot of information, but the question I'm asking is where is my place in the world?"

They are going to spend a good part of this phase and then after this phase, in the college and young adult years, figuring out where their place in the world is. They are going to be asking questions, reading books that don't necessarily agree with what you taught. They are going to be reading text books that don't teach what you have been trying to teach in the home. Mom and Dad, engage in this phase. Don't run from this phase. They have two things your students, 9th – 12th will tell you and I love it. Mickey was schooling me on it this week. There will be these two phrases you are going to hear from your students: "I know." "I got it." While you're trying to explain something to them, they'll come back with "I know." "Well, actually, I haven't even finished my thought yet. Let me finish it before you say you know what I'm about to say." But they say "I know" and "I got it."

Mickey says they are processing out loud. I just kind of laughed. My parents had an expression for that. My parents called processing out loud talking back. It's at this phase that parents and students begin to disconnect. Mom and Dad get tired of how they are the experts. They've just come out of the trial and error phase and now they are going into the belong and believe phase. Don't get worn out. Don't get worn down when they are asking you questions. When they are asking you questions, challenging what you've taught them, stay strong, stay calm. One parenting piece of advice we received a long time ago around here is "Freak out on the inside, not on the outside." Be the parent, be the safe person that a student says "I can talk to my dad about anything. He lets me wrestle with it."

A family came up and gathered with me after the first service and his mom was a clinical psychologist who understands all of these developmental phases. She grew up in an Irish Catholic family. She said "You didn't ask Mom and Dad questions in an Irish Catholic family. You didn't have an opinion in an Irish Catholic family. You did what you were told." Her husband grew up in a family where you talked everything out; processed through everything. And now, they are raising a sophomore. There are some challenges in this phase.

Here's the goal as we go through this. This is not a time for parents who have raised children through all of those phases to go on a guilt trip. This isn't the moment for you to say "I wish I would have done something differently or said something differently. I wish I would have spent more time and engaged more there." No. The goal is not to feed our regrets. The goal is to understand these phases in our children and our grandchildren and for us to have a plan and strategy in the home and in the church for what are we going to do in each of these phases.

Grandparents, you hear these phases and you come up with a plan. "I get my grandkids one week a summer. What am I going to do with that week? We'll do a lot of playing. We're tubing on the lake. We're eating out. We're go-carting. We're going to shows. We're having a lot of fun." But in the midst of that, look to your wife or husband and say "We have a responsibility; let's make the most of it."

We have a Sweet Spot set up back there. We want you to go back... As talk about these phases, go "You know what I'm really good with kids at that phase." My mom is the 0 – 5 years old phase. She loves holding babies. Some of you love working with the affirm stage. You remember the identity crisis you went through and you're like "Just give me some junior high girls to spend some time with. I will help them. I will show them. I will lead the way because they are entering into a tough season."

Some of you love working with students, some of you like working with kids. Some of you are like "Man, I know how to shoot a Nerf gun. Put me with elementary. Give me a lesson plan to follow. I love playing with that age."

So whatever phase we are talking about... Next week, Carey Nieuwhof is here. He is a pastor from Canada, part of the reThink Group in Atlanta where we get all of our curriculum and all of this that we are sharing with you this morning. Carey is going to be here to share with you how to fight for the heart of your child in every phase. I'll be the number one person on the front row taking notes, learning how to fight for my ten year old's heart and how to fight for my 12 year old's heart.

Reggie Joiner who is the founder of the reThink Group said this at a conference a couple of years ago and I'll never forget it. He said "I knew I was losing the heart of my teenage daughter and we were drifting apart." This is the one thing that I took from the conference that I never forgot. He said he didn't know what to say and he didn't know what to do, but he finally just walked into her room and said "We need to fight for this relationship. We need to work harder. I don't know what that looks like, but let's go out to eat and figure out a way to do that around a table together. Let's you and I begin fighting for the relationship."

So whatever season you're in personally... We also have people here that say "We don't have kids and we definitely don't want kids and we think this series is going to validate our desire to have no kids." Okay. Maybe that will change as a result of this series, but also, you may say "Okay, we don't have kids, we don't have kids yet, we don't plan on having kids for while, but we do know this is our church family and we need to plug in and serve." Stop by the Sweet Spot and ask them to give you a role, a spot, a part to play.

I want to just share with you some of the foundations of our family ministry. I want to share what you know we believe here about children, the plan we have, and the plan we hope you develop throughout this series in your home.

1. We Value Children.

Children matter to us here at Woodland Hills. We believe childhood is a significant period of life. We believe that childhood and every phase of childhood is significant and needs to be intentional. We need intentional parenting. We need intentional church strategy to reach kids at every phase. When Jesus spoke the words in Mark 10 that we are going to read here in a second, you need to understand the culture 2,000 years ago when this scene takes place. In Greco-Roman culture, all of childhood was an insignificant phase of life because you didn't produce anything. You didn't add anything to culture. Even in that day, little boys were valued more than little girls because the idea was little boys had more value because they grew up to become men and they produced more. So childhood was insignificant.

Then Jesus comes along. If you have your Bibles and you're looking Mark 10, you may see that Jesus welcomed children. A better way to understand that is Jesus valued children because of the culture he's in and because of the context this passage rests in.

13 *People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them.* The disciples had the mindset of that day and of that culture. "Keep the kids away from Jesus. He's got other important stuff to do. Don't you think children should be seen and not heard?" So the disciples were caught up in this mentality that children are a complete and total waste of time to spend time with them or to have ministry with them. I love Verse 14. We come in as Jesus did what he did all of his ministry. He took everything people believed and turned it upside down.

14 *When Jesus saw this, he was indignant.* *Indignant* is a heavy word for very angry. He was mad. We see all the paintings in the Christian book stores and this is one of those paintings. It's Jesus sitting on a rock holding children with a big smile on his face. I think a better painting would be Jesus holding these children on his lap with the disciples in the corner of the picture and Jesus is looking back with a scowl on his face towards the disciples. That would be a better display of Mark 10 and this story. Jesus rebukes the disciples and he's going to now teach them how important kids are. Not only how important children are, but how important ministry to children is. He's going to tell them we value kids. We need to not only embrace them, but to bless them and have ministry to them.

He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them..." I think a great church ministry, a family ministry is how many roadblocks can we remove from children on their way to the Lord? Don't throw in roadblocks. Let's not hinder them. Let's find ways to point them to Jesus. ***"...for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."*** He's saying "The work we're doing here is about these kids."

15 "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Now he's using the children as a prop. He's saying you should come to faith like this little child. There may be some of you here that are not going to place faith in Jesus until you figure it all out. You have a lot of questions that you feel need to get answered. But think about how a little child in this phase would receive the Lord. When they hear the good news of Jesus, they accept it and they receive it. They may have questions, but they take it. Jesus is saying this is how all of us should place faith in Jesus. We should come to him like a little child.

I opened the paper this week... I hope this doesn't get me in trouble with area churches, but here we go. I opened the paper and I just looked at all the ways churches advertise their church in our local paper. I don't think this is actually... It's like they have to put everything they believe as a church on a piece of paper to reach people. One of the churches had bullet points for who they were as a church. Two of the bullet points were *dispensational* and *pretribulational*. For the five people in our community who know what those two words mean, you'll probably reach them, but I'm thinking you should probably go with words like *warm and friendly, we won't hate you, we won't tell you you're going to hell and we are excited about it*. I don't think most people... By the way, my theology is pretribulational and dispensational. Some of you want a series on that so that when you get that figured out, you'll come to the Lord. No, you come to the Lord like a little child. I want to remind you that the little child is shooting Nerf bullets and in those moments you share with him who Jesus is. You share with her as you play the game of Life and Monopoly. You're engaged and now you're sharing the good news.

16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

One of the most powerful illustrations of this I received years ago was from our Family Ministries Director Stephanie Watson. She has two teenage boys. I think the sky is the limit for those two guys, Sam and Roy. I think God's going to use them in big ways. I speak blessing over them. Sometimes it's a very strong word and they are tired of hearing me say "Get a job!" But I'm a friend of theirs. I love that family and I love those two guys. Stephanie said "You know what's so heartbreaking? It's when we walk into a store or into a restaurant and older people look at my two sons. They've done nothing; they've just walked into the store and there is that look on their face like they think they are thugs." Some of you may have lived by a teenager growing up and the kid was a holy terror and now you've painted every teenager with that brush. Ask the Lord during this series to change your heart towards teenagers. Embrace teenagers. Don't look at them as thugs. Engage them.

How about this? You're at the store. I saw this last week. A mom was hit by her child. That always kind of shocks me. Any sort of violence shocks me, but when I see a six year old hit his mom, I'm just ready to

take my belt off and this is not going to be good. But my first thought was *Had I ever hit Bonnie Cunningham as a six year old, I would not be your pastor today. I would not be alive today.*

You look at that and what is your first thought. You think he's a punk kid. Yes he needs discipline; I 100% agree, but what can I do in that moment to bless that family?

How about this? I've seen this scene play out I don't know how many times. You're sitting in a plane and a mom walks in with two children. She's holding one while one is walking behind. She has a stroller, car seat, potty seat, a gallon of antibacterial product and she's making her way down the aisle. Just watch. Everybody disconnects from that mom. It's amazing to me. *Oh, I don't want to look at her. I don't want to have to get up and help her. That would be awkward.* But what if your thought when you see that mom with those two children was *Father, please place that family in the two seats next to me.* A business man is going "Heck no, I ain't praying that prayer. I'm in 6A; they can be in 26A. I think that would be a much better deal. I will put on my noise-canceling headphones and we will drown these children out. "

I see it on the face of a mom. How many know what I'm talking about? You know the mom is worried about her kid being an inconvenience. Her kid should be loved and embraced.

How about in church? It's a good time to share this. It didn't really work in the first service because we did have two screaming kids. How do you respond to a child screaming in church? Is your first thought to remove the distraction or *thank you, Father, for that child?* Know the difference. I'm talking about a baby compared to a six year old who should have something shaped similarly to a paddle... But what is your value on a screaming child? Insignificant, pain, distraction or can God do something in your heart and my heart to where we're like *What's a moment that I can have today with a child where I can bless that child, I can bless that family.* This is the heart of your Savior. This should be our heart as well.

2. We value every child at every phase.

We value teenagers like we value babies. We want to be a church and we want to be families that we engage at every phase. A couple of things about phases... 1) Make the most of every phase. Have a plan for every phase. Do something with the phases. 2) Don't rush the next phase. You're like "No, Ted, with this phase we are going to get through it. I can't wait to play games."

I told a friend years ago that I couldn't wait to go to Silver Dollar City without the stroller. I was ready to be done with the stroller. I was exhausted to be done with the stroller. He said "I've got a better phase. It's when you walk into Silver Dollar City and look at your kids and tell them to meet you back there at 4:00. Now that's a good phase." I think an even better phase is when your kids start taking you to Silver Dollar City and paying for it. But don't rush to the next phase; embrace the phase your in.

3. We are an additional voice in the life of your child.

This is how our partnership works with you. It's this graphic that we've been using around here for eight years. Woodland Hills Family Church is a partner with an additional voice. We are not the primary

discipler of your child. If you're looking for a church with a drop-off ministry, you will not reap the maximum benefit from this church.

It was hard for us to find a guy for Student ministries. We are grateful we found Mickey Pitman. We had a very difficult time finding youth guys that understood this right here. Most youth guys have been trained to be the song and dance for the kids. "I'm going to swallow a goldfish, eat a stick of butter and see what comes out of it." So when you hear "Student Director" at our church, don't think youth pastor. Don't think of the guy who organizes lock-ins. I want you to think of Mickey Pitman as a partner to parents. He wants to walk alongside parents and echo what you are already saying. Your kid may have a problem you want Mickey to fix and we get that, but we want you to be the primary voice.

Here's what we understand about additional voices. Have you ever said something to your child over and over again and then they go to their friend's house and they hear their friend's dad say something? They come back to you and go "You would never believe what Johnny's dad said..." You're like "I've been saying that for years." But an additional voice comes in and says it and it reinforces what you've been saying. The lessons here are identify, first of all, and then invest in the additional voices in the life of your child.

I learned this from Sonya Hayter. She said "Ted, you want the secret to raising teenagers? You have the best stocked refrigerator in the neighborhood. You make your refrigerator a vending machine. You make them want to come to your house and then you begin to invest in all the additional voices that your child is leaning into."

We have a family in our life that invests in our children and we invest in their children. That's the family you go on vacation with. That's the family you invest in deeply when you're trying to figure out who to invest in. Some of you are investing in coaches. Coaches are additional voices. Teachers are additional voices. Woodland Hills desires to be not the primary, but the secondary. We desire to be the additional voice in the life of your child.

So the home is yellow and the church is red and together we form orange, which is the whole point of the series. We are working together through every phase of your child's life. The home has 3,000 hours a year of intentional time. We are told that church leaders have roughly 40 hours with your child. I don't think that true at Woodland Hills. I'm going to say it's 26 to 40 hours because a lot of you in here are every other weekers. You participate every other week so that would be 26 times. So that's 26 hours.

I want you to know the hour your child is spending in WildWoods or Critter Street or Student Ministry this week... Understand that hundreds of hours have gone into that hour to be intentional, to be finding ways to equip parents to begin teaching this message at home, making this the primary message being taught in the home. Then when they come back to the church, whether they come back to a program or youth meeting, wildwoods or Critter Street, all we are doing is saying what Mom and Dad are already saying. We are an additional voice.

What are we saying? That's the next four points.

4. Our church desires to echo that God is their creator.

This is the first message I want to get into the heart of my child starting 0 – 5 years of age in the Embrace phase. Our church desires to echo that God is their Creator. I want my kids to understand God made them. They are created in the image of God. They are fearfully and wonderfully made. I want that to go deep into the heart of my child, starting at a very early age.

I love having a ten year old that when we go to the planetarium and he starts hearing about God's creation, but they are not giving any credit to the creator, it ticks him off. I'm like *thank you Father*. When they say the earth is 4.8 billion years old, Carson gets so frustrated. I tell my kids that when they get to the mobilize phase, they are going to read stuff in books that ain't true. They are going to have professors tell them things that are flat out lies. They are demonic schemes. They are plans of the evil one to take them down, but we, from a very early age, taught them who their creator is. We taught them that their value as a child came because they are created in the image of God, not because of anything they do or don't do. Their value does not come based on their accomplishments or achievements or how awesome they can throw a ball. Their value comes because they are fearfully and wonderfully made, created in the image of Almighty God, period.

When a child gets that, it changes how they see themselves and others. You don't start at 0 – 5 years old teaching your kids dispensationalism. You start by teaching them that God is their Creator and it will stick.

5. We echo here that Jesus is their Savior.

When a person truly believes that Jesus died for them and their sins are forgiven, they are able to accept themselves and love others, imperfections and all. You're not defined by your mistakes. Your identity is established in Christ. In him we live and move and have our being. So no matter what hits you in life, no matter what challenges you face, no matter what mistakes you make in the trial and error phase, understand you are created in the image of God, Jesus is your Savior, his blood covers you. We want you to get this. We want you to understand this.

6. We echo that the Holy Spirit is always with them.

When your friends abandon you and you feel like the enemy is winning and you feel like there is no one to turn to... When a person believes God is truly with them, they walk in confidence, knowing they are never alone. You might call this a Trinitarian parenting style. God is their creator, Jesus is their Savior, and the Holy Spirit is always with them.

I can't help but think of the parent right now who says "I have a young adult who has walked away from all of this." I've heard story after story after story and I've watched. Our friend, Dan Seaborn, who I think did a fantastic job with Psalm 78 a couple of weeks ago, talked about multi-generational discipleship. Dan has a saying that is spot on. He's raised plenty of teenagers. He says at some point, every teenager's brain falls out. It happened to all of us. For some of us, it falls out for six months, for some of us it may be six years.

There are some of you who have a young adult and you've given up. You can't give up. Understand the things you shared with them while you were drying them off, the things you shared with them while you were shooting the Nerf gun is in there.

I've heard this illustration I don't know how many ways, but maybe you can think of it like a backpack. You've been placing stuff in a backpack and they've gone out, but they are not mobilized. They have abandoned you and they have a chip on their shoulder. Keep praying and don't give up. The truth of God goes out.

7. We prepare children to leave home.

This is part of our Twolgnite messaging. We don't walk alongside trophy parents at Woodland Hills. We're not trying to have children that are just awesome so that we can use their attributes and accomplishments to impress other people. That's not our heart here. Our heart is that they will be great husbands and wives, fathers and mothers one day.

Genesis 2: 24 - ***That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.***

We are ultimately preparing new families. We are ultimately teaching new families. And isn't it something that many of you abandoned everything your parents taught you through these phases, but then when you had your first child, you found your way back to church. There was just something that happened in you. You realized, with the birth of your first child, that we need an additional voice. "I don't think we can do this alone." "Honey, I love you, but you can't balance a checkbook and now they've given us a little human to raise?"

Did you ever leave the hospital thinking *Why are you letting me leave with this human? You've unplugged him from all the stuff and you're sending me home with a gift bag that's going to last about a week and now I'm on my own?* Yeah, and that's why you're here. You don't want to do this alone. I'm grateful for a church that has partnered with Ted and Amy Cunningham to be an additional voice in the life of Corynn and Carson.

When we are gone and not at Woodland Hills, my kids pitch a fit. They're like "Wait... we're going to be gone on Sunday. You didn't tell us that. We wouldn't have come to Disney if we would have known we were going to be gone on Sunday."

"If the time ever came where God led me to do something else and I wasn't a pastor or I did marriage and family ministry in another way would you be okay if I wasn't the pastor of Woodland Hills?"

They're like "Yeah, we're fine with that so long as we don't leave Woodland Hills." That's their mindset.

Can I just encourage some of you to lean more into the church? I know there are a lot of other voices out there in the life of your child, but this is a voice that you want in the life of your child. If you're a

guest here today and you're visiting our church, don't take your kid to a church that ends up teaching him how to hate the church.

Andy Stanley has been teaching this at North Point. Teach them the word of God and then plug them into a church that will partner with you. I want that day where I'm sitting at a table... You've been there. I saw it yesterday. I had lunch at the Keeter Center. I saw senior adults sitting at a table and the light is leaving them. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? They are there, but they are not fully engaged in the conversation. They are surrounded by their children, grandchildren, and in some cases great grandchildren. This is a good moment.

We love Gary Smalley around here. He is a friend of ours. He had heart surgery last year and he has just never really recovered from that. He is at about 50%. He's very weak and doesn't get along very well. He uses a wheelchair most of the time. Last month, we took him out on the boat for three hours on Table Rock Lake. We just had a ball. We were talking about the lake and everything and he said "Man, doesn't a piece of chocolate cake sound good right now?" He kept whispering this to me. I told him I didn't know where to get him a piece of chocolate cake. He kept saying "I would love a piece of chocolate cake."

We played and then we went to Big Cedar for dinner. We got off the boat and we were walking into the restaurant. I grabbed a waitress and I go "I know this is a weird request, but if we could make this happen real fast... Can you go into the back, cut me the biggest piece of chocolate cake you can find, get the piping bag out and pipe as much whip cream on it to make it the grandest display of a piece of chocolate cake you've ever done, and get it to this man." She got excited, so she goes back to get it.

Gary sat down and opened up the menu. Before drink orders were taken, this lady set this piece of cake in front of him. He lit up. Norma Smalley goes "Ted! He's diabetic!" You know what I said. It came out of my mouth that fast. My exact words were "I don't care." I believe when you are old and you have raised your children and you have led them in the way of the Lord and you're sitting at a table barely speaking or engaging in conversation, you can eat whatever you want. That's my opinion.

Here's my favorite. Dan Seaborn says he has to go to Walmart to get illustrations. I have to go to the Keeter Center to get my illustration. I saw it yesterday. It's the World War II Veteran, 90 plus years old wheeled up to a table. He wants to order and his wife is shooting him down. "You can't have that. You can't have that."

I want to go up to the table with pastoral authority and say "Your husband fought in World War II. He sacrificed for our country. He saved the world for us. He can eat whatever he wants. May he die with lard in his mouth." I'm telling you I want this. Do you want this? When you're old, do you want to be sitting at a table and have a child who recognizes what you did in the family and how you helped the generations...? They bring you chocolate cake to place you in a diabetic coma and you're able to look at your children and your grandchildren and your great grandchildren and you're able to say "God is good. Thank you for the years, thank you for the generations that this message has been given to. I had my shot and I took." Grandma and Grandpa, that's you.

I had a grandpa come up to me after the last service and say "I boated every phase for four hours yesterday on Table Rock in tubes. I thought it was just personality, but it's not just personality; it was also the phases. I'm leaving here today, charged up to be more intentional. I'm going to make sure my grandchildren and my great grandchildren know God is their Creator, Jesus is their Savior, and the Holy Spirit is always with them," and all God's people said... Amen.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time today. Thank you for a church that is partnering with my kids. Thank you for every person who volunteers in this church, who works and loves on babies and plays Nerf with elementary students, who sits in groups of junior high girls to talk about boys, who gathers with teenagers and young adults who are processing their place in the world and in life.

Continue to use Woodland Hills to be a church that's an additional voice in the life of all these parents. May Mom and Dad leave here today challenged in this series to put a plan in place to begin the messaging in their home and to have a strategy that we would be prepared for the attacks of the evil one.

It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen