



Thank You Notes
Part 2-Thanking Those Who Inspire You
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're grateful that you're here. It's been a busy week. We had the GOP debate on Wednesday night that we had to watch. Then we had to get ready for Halloween. I usually do emails and all of that, but I ran out of time and so I was wondering if it would be okay with you if I did some thank you notes as part of the beginning of the service. For the other half of you, I want you to know this is inspired by Jimmy Fallon. He's the one that came up with the idea, but we are trying to keep them all local and so we're writing our own thank you notes. Last week my mom was like "That Shay is just something else." Did Shay not do a great job last week? I asked my mom if she had ever watched the late show? She hadn't, so I had to make sure the other half of you know where we're getting it.

Bobby, can I get some thank you note writing music please?

"Thank you, Trunk or Treat, for giving Christians a permissible alternative to Halloween, because inviting children over to the back of your van to get candy is far less creepy than going door to door."

"Thank you, Yakov Smirnoff, for giving us great laughs in Branson for the past 23 years and for letting us know this is your final season for the last six years in a row. See you next year."

"Thank you, #52in15 tattoo, for revealing to the world our church's commitment to marriage and for preventing a lot of other bad tattoos."

"Thank you, Nyquil, for giving us what we need to get a whole night's rest and for preparing Ben Carson for these GOP debates."

"Thanks you, President Obama..."

"Thank you, CNBC, for your coverage of the GOP debate and for giving some Christians yet another reason to lose their testimony on Facebook and Twitter." #quitrantingonfacebook #unfriendpharisees #wakeupben.

That's it. That's our thank you notes for this day. Would you help me thank Bobby who does a fantastic job? That's what working 40 years in Branson will do to you right there.

We are in this series called *Thank You Notes*. If your brand new today and this is your first time, we are going through the Book of 1 Thessalonians. If you have a Bible, turn to 1 Thessalonians. If you do not, that's okay; we will have it on the screen for you.

Shay did a good job last week introducing this book. He really dealt with idolatry and the idols that creep into our lives that take the place of God and what we can do about that. He gave a great intro to the book. If you're brand new, just to catch you up quickly, this is a letter written by Paul who started the church in Thessalonica. After he leaves, he hears a great report of their faith, but he sends young Timothy back to find out what's going on and how he can help.

Timothy returns to Paul and he's loaded down with questions, questions from new, young believers. If you've studied the Bible for a while, you know 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy are books of the Bible, letters that Paul wrote to young Timothy. They are great mentoring passages, great letters written to a young pastor on how to keep going in ministry. First Thessalonians is a letter written to young believers of how to keep going in the faith.

When you read this text today – Chapter 2 is where we'll be – you'll see that he has to kind of fix some things. He's still challenging them, saying, "You're doing great in your faith, but I understand some of my opponents, some of the people that went against me while I was there in Thessalonica are talking into your ear just a little bit and I want to give you a defense for my ministry." It can be awkward teaching this, as a pastor and as a leader, because he's going to be sharing leadership principles with young believers on why he did what he did and really how they should respond to it.

Up until about Thursday, the message was called *Thanking Those Who Lead You*, but then, as you see the broader context and you see the broader application of this book, you see that we need to be thanking those who have inspired us. We need to be thanking those who have inspired our faith. We hope that it's very practical. The tone of this book is that Paul is giving a very patient reply to these questions that they have.

I look around at our senior adults in here right now. They're the ones, first of all, that are just grateful to be here; I can just see it all over them. But when you ask them a question, they're just soft in their answer back. Not like a lot of us who are younger. When we're asked questions of opposition, we can get pretty defensive. That's not the tone here. The tone here is just this patient reply. "Let me explain to you again..."

Really, he does three things in this book. Again, he makes the gospel central – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He then covers doctrine. In the five chapters of this book, he covers the resurrection, the second coming of Christ, and the nature of the scripture. He covers the power of the Holy Spirit, the trinity, assurance of salvation, and he talks about removing the idols from your life. It's great doctrine. That's the second part, but the third part is you see his application throughout this whole book. That's where we want to take you today.

The context of where we are in 1 Thessalonians 2 today is leadership. If you are leader, you can take away from this some of the marks of maturity in your life as a leader. "Am I doing this well?" "Is this

something I need to work on?" "I want to make sure I'm shoring this up." If you're one who resists leadership or authority, it's a good opportunity for you to kind of step back and be like "Okay, what do I have to learn from God's word today."

As I was studying this week... I've been hearing a lot about this morning talk show. People have told me I have watch it so they can get my thoughts on it, so I said I was going to watch it. I have to be honest with you. Five minutes in, it was sad. I wasn't mad or angry; I was just profoundly sad at these women and what they were saying. Now don't try to figure out what show I'm talking about. It's a bunch of women sitting around a table and their sharing their point of view. Throughout the show, I kept hearing.... There's a bitterness and there's a tone. At first, I was thinking *Who hurt them?*

But then one of them said this and this makes sense of the rest of the show because it painted a picture of their entire worldview. One of them said with passion, "I don't want anyone telling me what to do." That's it right there. Before we judge them, have you ever felt like that? Will any of you go into work tomorrow thinking *I don't want anybody telling me what to do?* Do we have any Link Year or Institute students here? Do you ever want to look at Adam like *You ain't telling me what to do?* We do.

I raised two two-year-olds. This was their mission statement through the twos and threes. They put this on little inspirational quotes up on their wall with people surfing and climbing mountains. This is why we have parents. Parents are supposed to discipline this out of a two-year-old. As soon as this lady said I don't want anyone telling me what to do, I thought *Well that's what two year olds and criminals say.* Then you know what the crowd does? They start applauding and cheering. "I am my own person."

Let me just break it down; I'm going to paraphrase it. "I don't need God, I don't need you, I don't need civil government, I don't need anybody and I am the one." We all have been there. This was the bottom line of Shay's whole message. You, me, I'm it, you're it; you don't need authority.

So let's start to give context to 1 Thessalonians 2. Let's look at Hebrew 13: 17. ***Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.***

I love authority. I don't like being the one in authority, I really don't. My personality goes that way, but I was raised by rules based parents, so it's the message written on my heart. I know the dos and the don'ts. I like to know the structure of any program I'm in. I was one of the few kids... I went to Liberty University and they had something called *The Liberty Way*. It was the manual you read for all the things you were going to do to obey the rules. I was probably the only student at Liberty that actually read it from cover to cover.

I want to make sure I'm following the rules, but it's all different when you're the one who sets the rules. And all the parents know what I'm talking about if you have that personality that loves to conform to structure, authority, and rules. For some of you right now, you know the struggle. There's a little bit of a struggle in your soul right now and you're thinking of some people in your life that have done you wrong and as we talk about leadership today, you're thinking you will never find gratitude in your soul towards a particular person.

Here's what we know. There is good and bad authority, but submission to authority is a mark of maturity. Disobedience and rebellion are marks of immaturity. But that person who submits to... And we all submit. Some of you submitted down Shepherd of the Hills today when it went from 45 mph to 35 mph. Some of you didn't, but a lot of you did. You know right where it is; right there before Pierce Arrow. And your frustrated, but right at that moment, you were submitting to authority. Those of you who didn't, you're here today and the invitation is at the end of this message and you've got some repenting to do. But in the home, I submit unto the Lord. Amy submits unto me. The children, when they want to, submit unto us.

Submission is not "I've made it to a point now in life that I don't submit to anyone." No, that's not how it works. Here's what we know from the scripture too. Respect for authority begins at home. To piggy back a little bit off of Shay's talk last week, he shared the Ten Commandments. We looked at "I am the Lord your God; have no other gods before me. Don't make anything that looks like me." And then it goes on to say "Don't mess with my name, don't mess with my day. Honor your father and your mother." We went into Exodus 20: 12. "**Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.**"

Again, it always comes back to those first two commandments. Love the Lord your God. You are to love the Lord you God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. **Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.** There is a God. He is the only God. He is our Lord. So he's giving you this land and in it now if you have a problem with any of those last eight commandments, you have to go back to the first two because that's where the problem really lies. If you have a problem with submitting to the authority of a parent, if you have a problem respecting the authority in your life, you have a deeper issue.

That's what I tell young people all the time when they ask me about dating... What's the number one question I always get about dating? The very first question I get about dating is what age should we allow our kids to start dating? I tell parents that's not the most important question they should be asking. Age is not the most important question. The most important thing to be teaching our children is not to date someone who does not respect mom and dad. It starts there. That's because then curfews and age and all of the other strategy involved with dating flows from does the boy you're interested in, the boy your crushing on right now respect his parents? If he does, that's a good check; let's pursue that. If he's putting down mom and dad, if the language he uses about his parents isn't good, boy I'd be careful.

Do you know why that's important? That's because you want to date and marry someone who can keep a job. If they don't know how to respect their parents, they can't keep a job. Mom and Dad are just a figure in their life for just a little while, but then they're going to go to college and there's going to be a different authority and then they are going to go to their job to a different authority. It's all authority. So watch how they treat Mom and Dad because respect for authority begins at home and that gives you so much of a picture into their soul.

Here's where we are going to jump into 1 Thessalonians. The whole context of 1 Thessalonians 2 is on leadership and on Paul's authority as an apostle. Why Paul was in Thessalonica in the first place, what

he did while he was there... All of it's being called into question. There were Jews that were raising up these questions. "Are you sure? Paul's not even here anymore. The founding pastor doesn't even come back; he sends an associate? Does he even care for us?" Here is what we know and what we are going to see in this text.

Good leaders leverage their authority for the benefit of others.

So if you're taking notes, this is also a good primer for a presidential election. Sometimes leaders can have this problem where they get into it for the money. Leaders get into it for the power, they get into it for the prestige, they get into it for the next promotion. But a good leader, a great leader is constantly aware of the needs around him and he seeks to leverage the authority, the power, the money, or whatever it is that comes with his position. His desire is to use all of that to be a blessing to other people.

We will jump in to Verse 1. **1 You know, brothers and sisters ...** So he's speaking to the believers, these young, baby Christians in Thessalonica. **...that our visit to you was not without results.** They came to faith. They placed faith in Jesus. **2 We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition.**

So many of us are here today because leaders chose not to give up on us. Leaders were being attacked from all sides. There was persecution and opposition. There were people who would have loved to see this church or this leader or this ministry go down, but they stuck with it. I think this is a test of leadership. If when it gets tough, a leader quits, I think you have to ask if it was about the leader or the people. But if you find a leader who goes... I've been around some leaders that I have sat there and watch them be attacked. There is a reason they are now awaiting to be attacked at 50 and 60. I don't have the stamina to put up with what they are putting up with. But these leaders kept going and kept going. Do you know why? It's because it was about people; it wasn't about them. They were willing to risk everything because of their desire to care for people. He's kind of telling the Thessalonian believers that because of this opposition, he was able to get to them. He didn't stop, he didn't quit. Beatings didn't get him down and imprisonment didn't keep the gospel from going out. If anything, for those who are called by God, it is fuel to keep moving forward.

3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives... You can see these are some of the questions that young Timothy is bringing back to them. They were trying to figure out why he came to Thessalonica in the first place. **...nor are we trying to trick you.** They weren't trying bait and switch, they weren't trying to say one thing and do another. **4 On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.** **5 You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed...** It wasn't about trying to get money. And then he gives a clear explanation about what he did. **...God is our witness.**

6 *We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority.* They didn't assert their authority, but instead they leveraged it. They took all that God called them to do, all that they put up with in that process, and they brought it because they cared for them. And that's the next big idea as we go into Verse 7.

Good leaders care about people.

Good leaders care about people. The desire is the people. In the next year of debates and politics, you are going to see this get lost. I want the ear of the candidate who cares for people, talks about people. That's why we listen to the leaders who use personal stories. They don't just talk about the people of their state; they talk about a specific couple they talked to that week... They are getting into the lives of people. That's exactly what Paul does now as he comes into Thessalonians. He uses one of our favorite word pictures of a family to describe how much he cared for them while he was there and how much he still cares for them. That's why he is so excited to get this report back from Timothy on their faith.

7 *Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, 8 so we cared for you.* He starts with a mom and how much a mom cares for her children. I know Amy Cunningham cares for the physical, emotional, relational, nutritional, and financial... all of the needs of our family. I was thinking week that I wanted a good illustration for Bonnie Cunningham because my mom cared and continues to care for me. "How did she care for me, Lord? What illustration can I use this week that would show the desire my mom had to care for me and why she was a great mom?" She bawled through the whole first service. We all took a moment to just look at her and watch her cry for a few seconds.

In 1990, I got my driver's license and needed a car. We went to a lot that had this huge selection; there were about eight cars to pick from in Oswego, Illinois. It was a used car lot. My dad walks over to this smokin' awesome car. It was a 1984 Mercury, Marquis downsized. It was blue. It was owned by a 90-year-old man who had just passed away. He smoked cigars. When I opened the door, it hit you in the face. I sat in the passenger seat because my dad has to drive it.

We're driving down the road and I'm coughing; it had a strong cigar smell. He was sure we would be able to get rid of the smell. So we bought the car for \$1,900.00 and we got it home. I told my mom I loved it and that it would work fine and get me through high school, but I said "It has the strongest cigar smell. It's very bad!"

My mom said, "Oh, do you know what you need to do? You have to eat an apple and throw the core in the back seat." I asked her why and she said, "Because apple cores absorb smoke."

I wasn't sure about it, but I decided to go with it. So I would get in the car everyday, eat an apple, and throw the core in the back seat. After a couple of months, the floor and everything is full of apple cores and it still smells as bad as it did the day I bought it. Has anybody here ever heard that apple cores absorb smoke? This was before the days of Pinterest.

So as I'm driving this week, I'm thinking about how my mom was trying to help me get the smoke out of my car. I'm at The Landing and I'm getting ready to make my turn to go through the roundabout and all that and right in front of the Bass Pro Shop, the Lord tells me "Ted, 25 years later, I think it's important for you to know this. That was you mom's way of getting you to eat an apple every day."

Have you ever had moments like that with your parents 25 years later? You like "What?!! I fell for that?!!" I started to get all worked up and I was going to call and lay into her, but then I thought *That is deceitful and brilliant all at the same time*. So before you judge my mother, you moms who are sneaking everything into the brownies today like zucchini and spinach... You learned that from your grandma, but she wasn't sneaking in that kind of vegetable, I can tell you that. Flaxseed in the pancakes? Amy, like a lot of moms in here, cares about the health of her children. I told my mom she did everything she could. She goes "You kids loved Nutter Butters and Ding Dongs. To get you to eat healthy was a lot of work."

My 10 year old has these certain food groups that he likes and it's burgers, grilled cheese, and macaroni and cheese. And when they bring out non-Kraft macaroni and cheese, there is a revolt. I mean there is like a rebellion at our table. "What is this?!" It is four-cheese mac and cheese with crumbles on it; it's gourmet. He wants no part of it; he wants the crumbs off of it. At 10, I'm done picking the little crumbs off the macaroni and cheese. He is going to learn to eat it. But you're also going to need to learn to eat vegetables not hidden in things.

Is there a leader in here that understands the parallel? We have to share with our children, with those that God has placed us in leadership over. We have to say and do things and we are met with "I don't want anybody telling me what to do. I will eat what I want."

Paul uses this beautiful example of a nursing mother caring for her children. He's saying this is how we cared for you when we were among you. We didn't just come in and preach. That's what he gets into in the next verse.

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God ... So "yes we declared for you the death and resurrection of Jesus. We explained all of that to you." ...but our lives as well. ⁹ Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. "We didn't want to be a burden so we had jobs that provided for our physical needs so we could continue to proclaim the gospel and to care for you. That was our desire. We wanted to invest and to give into your life.

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children... How does a father deal with children? We encourage them. We comfort them when they fall, when they get hurt. When something happens, I want to comfort my children. ***12 ...encouraging, comforting and urging...*** Sometimes we dads spend too much time on the urging. We think if we just urge them enough we wouldn't have to do as much of the comforting. If they would just learn.

A good dad encourages, comforts and urges his children. ...***you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.***

“Son, I’m telling you this, I’m encouraging you, I’m sharing this with you; I’m constantly reminding you of this for a purpose. I want you to live a life worthy of God and the calling he has placed in your life. So I’m going to keep doing this.”

How many of you would say amen to this? Parenting is the hardest thing on the planet. You like “Well, but then they leave home.” Let me tell you, I’ve talked to a lot of empty nesters who... yes they enjoy date night every night, but they are still parenting adult children. I’m not talking about giving them rules to live by and all that, but a relationship with your children even after they leave home is challenging. It can be discouraging. I believe you still encourage, comfort, and urge. We are still called...

I have to say this to parents because I’ve been talking to some folks my age with kids the age of our kids. I talk to people who have such high expectation on the grandparents. Let me just see a show of hands. My parents aren’t in this service; we can talk however we want. You say, “Ted, honestly, my folks are living here in town (or they don’t live in town). I think sometimes I put too high an expectation on my parents as grandparents when it comes to my children.” I do and I’ve talked to a lot of people who have.

Can I ask the grandparents in here? You say, “With adult children and grandchildren, for all the blessings there are, there are challenging and difficult times.” Can I tell you what adult children want from their parents? I’ve asked people that have told me this is right. We want our parents to be stronger than us. Still at 41 years old, I want 68-year-old Ronald Cunningham to be stronger than me. I want to be able to go over to my dad’s house and be able to share with him and to hear my dad be one in my life who encourages me, comforts me, and urges me. “Way to go son. You did that well. Good job.”

Some of you are like “Ted, we’ve got our kids and we get together every now and then” and I know it can be difficult, but still be the one who leads in the home even though it’s a new kind of leadership. We will get more practical in just a bit.

Good leaders prioritize God’s word.

I’m learning this as a dad. I don’t want to be a leader in a home where I’m constantly just giving my opinion. I want to point my kids back to the scripture as often as I possibly can. I remember when we thought, years ago, that God was calling us to another ministry in another part of the country. We were looking at houses in this city and talking about it. The kids were loving it until they figured out we were actually looking to buy one of the houses. I remember the kids telling us... They were like six and eight. I remember them telling us they were not moving. I told them we might be and tried to explain. “I didn’t know this was part of our... No. We are not leaving Branson!” They are giving me this clearly.

Then I said ‘What if God calls us here?’ I could see both of them were thinking, *Ohhh, he threw the God card out again; I knew he was going to do that.* It was neat to watch them wrestle with that in their soul.

Mom and dad, this is the secret to our success. We put it back to God's word. We bring them back to God's word. We remind them of what the scripture teaches. My kids will argue with me way quicker than they will argue with God. We point our children to Jesus rather than to us.

Watch how Paul... Now remember, this is a dad giving a patient reply to new and young believers.

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

Can I encourage with application today as we get specific and we drill down? I want to talk to you about this thing called the gratitude list. I want to talk to you about listing all the people who have inspired you, have inspired your faith, have challenged you, comforted you, encouraged you, urged you, and who cared for you. It maybe something that happened 30 years ago that you remember as you begin to write your gratitude list. You start writing down every person and everything.

I do this a lot when I'm thinking about stories for sermons or books. Something will hit me from my childhood and I'll feel like I need to call my dad right away, and I don't need to give him this list of everything he did from the time I was 10 to 20, but I can ask him if he remember when I was 12 and this happened and he did this? Dad, thanks. It's that simple. Do you want to interrupt your parent's day? Do you want to mess with your parents? Do you want to put your mom on the floor in tears? It works every time. You begin to write down and think through how you were cared for, comforted, encouraged, and urged, and how your faith grew as a result of this very moment in time.

Two weeks ago, I took my daughter and my mom... I had an event in Naperville, Illinois. I took the event because of it being in the place where I was born and the place where my mom grew up. I spent my days there. I'm in that very sentimental stage of life where I'm thinking through everything. It was one of the most gratitude-filled trips I've had in a very long time.

We landed in O'Hara and we rented the car. The first place we drove to was Grandma Mary Janes house. This is her house and this is her next-door neighbor. This house is 120 some years old. It has renters in it. My grandmother passed away last February. Corynn is our sentimental one and that's why I took her on the trip. My mom and I were just sitting there. The stories just started flooding back. I got stories from the kitchen inside that front door of my grandma's house. She spoke the words of Jesus over me. She would pour a cup of coffee in that little Corelle cup. You know what I'm talking about; it had that little brown pattern around the top. And she had the Folgers coffee; it was always Folgers. I bought her Maxwell House one time and she didn't like it. Then in the good seasons, we sat out front. I thought this was a great moment. There was always an American flag flying outside my grandma's house in every season. The Dupage River is a little ways from there. We were just telling story after story and we were just full of gratefulness.

Where did we go to next? We went to the cemetery because when the Cunningham's want to party, we go to the cemetery. This is the grave of my grandfather. He put them in the home we just saw. He passed away in 1980 and I was six years old. I don't have a lot of stories about my grandfather. I don't have words that he spoke over me and stories from sitting on his lap. I don't remember any of them. I

don't have any memory in my head of being with him although I was with him quite a bit for those first six years. But as I stood there over his grave... I know you've heard pastors say you should never visit a grave because those people are no longer there. To me, that's kind of weird because I don't go there to talk to my grandpa. I go there just to be grateful, to be reminded. My grandfather served in World War II and I'm standing there over his grave.

Here's my gratitude list. I'm here because of him. I have his DNA in me. When he was just a boy, he signed up, fought the Nazis, and saved millions of lives, including mine. Then I thought how I'm able to stand up and preach because I don't live in a communist country. I'm able to stand up and preach without fear of someone coming in today and arresting me. I'm grateful for the sacrifice of my grandfather.

My mom know everybody. She knows first names and last names and middle names of her first cousins, second cousins... She had 38 first cousins. As we walked around, I was trying to figure out where I wanted to be one day. I asked mom where she wanted to be.

Then we come up on this next site. This is Edward Sieben. Edward was the first Naperville resident who died in Viet Nam. My mom went to school with him and his siblings. She came upon the marker and started telling me the story and we stood there for a second, just grateful again for the sacrifice of so many people made for our freedom.

The next day, I had an event and my brother still lives up there. He came to three of the four sessions that I did. This is a picture of my brother, Andy Cunningham. I gave him the book *The Power of Home* that came out in September and he's reading about himself from my perspective. He's reading it and he's laughing. He's going "Ted, I can't believe you put that in the book." I told him that is why you should treat your younger siblings well. You never know how life is going to turn out.

Sitting there watching him read the book, my gratitude list towards Andy Cunningham started to grow. He's the hardest worker I know. I'm inspired by his hard work. I'm inspired by how in a neighborhood growing up, no one was allowed to beat up on me. He was the only one allowed to beat up on me. He never allowed anyone else to. He was my defender and my protector. He's four years older than I am. Story after story kept coming to mind and I was grateful to be able to hug my brother at the end and say "I love you, I'm grateful you're my brother."

I've had people tell me "Oh, you don't know my parents; I cannot say thank you." You can say thank you to your mom for giving birth to you. You can start that simply. I had someone at camp, years ago, tell me "You don't know my parents and I'm never going to say thank you. They are the weirdest, wacked out people on the planet."

I said, "Send them a note, thanking them for giving birth to you. Let's start that simply and see if God can begin to grow something in your heart."

I came back here that weekend and I stood in the back. I love that the last two weeks I've been here, but I've not been preaching, and I love attending Woodland Hills Family Church. I've asked the elders "If you ever fire me, can I please still attend Woodland Hills Family Church?"

My kids don't care if I'm the pastor here, but they don't want to leave Woodland Hills Family Church. I stood in the back and I took this picture. This is what you all look like with the back of your heads. I just said "Thank you, God for this group of people that gather each week. Thank you for the people that you're reaching through this church." It's always part of my prayer "Please do not let us screw this up," because we are faced with challenges here.

Last week was our largest non-holiday attendance in the history of our church. We had 1,788 people on this campus. You felt it after the last service in the parking lot last week, didn't you? I was in the parking lot with you trying to get to Tulsa. It's that moment... We have to practice Christian love every single Sunday in the parking lot. This is just a side note, but to be Christian, you only have to let one car in. Can I just say that? I'm out there as one of the pastors wondering how many cars I have to let out. And the guy behind me is getting frustrated at me. Then there was a tour bus here and we're all trying to get in front of the tour bus. But I'm grateful for you.

Now the last picture. I'm grateful for this kid right here. His name is Jameson Brawner. I love this kid. He made a mistake a few weeks ago. He came to me... He's one of the most diehard Cardinals fans you'll ever meet in your life. He came to me and said, "Hey, I'll make a bet with you, Ted." Then I sang him the Devil Went Down to Georgia song. He said, "If the Cardinals win the World Series, you'll have to preach in a Cardinals' jersey." I told him I would take that bet.

Then he said, "If the Cubs get into the playoffs, I will wear a Cubs' shirt on Sunday morning." What a privilege and an honor that is. The joy after taking that and then the joy of giving Jameson his Cub's shirt... Look at that cute little face right there. He's such a good sport. I drove off saying "Thank you, Father, for the generation you are bringing up here at this church who are ready."

To help you get your honor list going, let's just give you some encouragement.

Thank the person God used to bring you to faith in Jesus. What's that story? Maybe the preacher is no longer living. Maybe it was a ministry years ago. There are many of you in here that your story is you watched a television preacher and that's what God used to bring you to faith in Jesus. For some of you, it was a parent. I had my mom and dad on the seventh row. I thanked them personally for this because it was my parents who led me to Jesus when I was a small child.

Thank someone who helped your family out during a difficult time. Again, it may have been 20 or 30 years ago or it may have been last week. There are many in here who receive... Just so you know, this is the first Sunday of the month and the benevolence boxes are back there. It's called the mercy offering. We give a lot of resources out throughout this community to meet physical needs, but every dime you put in the mercy offering on the way out – and I encourage you to be generous there – is to meet the physical needs of families who are in here today. Sometimes there is frustration with that benevolence because we want to help people and some feel they need to try to pay it back. We're trying, as a church

family, to gather around you to help you through a difficult time. Just learn the words “Thank you for helping me. Thank you for helping my family.” Gratitude changes everything.

Thank the one who is constantly encouraging you. Thank the one who is always saying thank you to you. Thank the one who is encouraging and comforting you through a difficult time.

I think our town is the absolute best at this. In the next couple of weeks, you are going to have a ton of opportunity to thank men and women who have sacrificed for you. Find someone wearing a World War II hat or a Korean War hat or a Viet Nam hat or a Coast Guard hat or an Army hat or a Navy hat – whatever hat they are wearing – for the years of their service. I love the hats that give me what ship they were on and the years they served because it’s a great conversation starter. Give your kids a postcard that just says “Thank you for serving. Thank you for your sacrifice” and just set it on a table on your way out the door. Thank someone for the fact that you’re sitting here today in freedom.

Thank a friend who accepts you for who you are, but loves you too much to see you stay that way. Almost every person in here has a friend like this. They love you and accept you and they just shake their head every time you bring your story around. They love and encourage you, but they are speaking God’s truth into your life. I would say thank them and then start shaping up. Show them that their investment and their friendship with you is paying off.

Thank the teacher investing in your child. This is an opportunity. I just want to give us all a very practical way to do this as you leave here today. As you walk out, you are going to see people wearing red aprons. They make coffee every week and they are faithfully serving. It’s just super simple. As you walk out, just see someone and say “Thank you for my light blend. Thank you for the dark blend. I don’t know what you’re spiking that one with over there, but I love the seasonings. Thank you.”

How about being greeted by these folks wearing the shirts? Make eye contact with them. “Thank you. I love your smile.” We’ve heard from people... The smile and hug... We know guests don’t like to be hugged so we’re not hugging everybody, but the smile I get every Sunday takes me through the week for days. Just like when you go to the restaurant after church today, don’t just keep demanding things from the server. Every time they bring something to your table say “Thank you.”

Our family is doing a new thing now. When the food hits the table, we applaud. We are food people; we love food. If it’s like a real long time before we get our food, we don’t applaud because that looks sarcastic. The kids are always trying to ask me when to applaud. And then, for the server, we will applaud. One of our servers from the Keeter Center left after the first service. He told me he told his girlfriend that I was the guy that applauds. Make eye contact and say “Thank you.”

When you go to pick up your kids from Critter Street today, look the teachers right in the eyes and say “Thank you for investing in the life of my child.” Critter Street is not childcare. Critter Street is an investment in the life of your child. This church is an additional voice in the life of the children here. We want to say what we know mom and dad are saying.

When you pick them up from Wildwoods, kids are gathered around tables today in small groups, learning the word of God and all you have to do is say "Thank you for investing in my child."

Father, we're grateful for our time here this morning. We thank you for you are the only true God. There is only one God and we are speaking to you right now. You are our Lord. There are no other Lords before you. Thank you for all of those who serve this church. I ask that you continue to bless them. We thank them for their service.

I thank you for those who are sitting here today who have family and friends who have sacrificed for this country. We are grateful for the sacrifice and we say thank you. We thank the family member who has sacrificed as well because their loved one is no longer with them. May we leave here today and every picture we take and every post we make to social media be filled with gratitude. May the heart of ranting, venting, and nasty and ugly post... May that just fall away today and may we move to a place of gratefulness as we begin to show gratitude to those who inspire us.

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