



Next Step

Part 2 – From the Community to the Crowd

Pastor Ted Cunningham

This is going to be a good day. We're at step two in the Next Step series. We're looking at what it means to move from the community to the crowd. If you were here when we kicked this series off two weeks ago, you know we showed you these circles. The reason we are doing this series in April and May is because over the last twelve months or so, we've added roughly 500 people to our Sunday morning weekend experience and church services. As we are at the 1,700 to 1,800 mark, there are a lot of people who are trying to figure out what to do next, how to plug in, how to be a part of this church. We decided that we needed to do beyond the Starting Point class and explain it.

I've been looking at these circles for 20 years. In 1996, I read a book called *The Purpose Driven Church* by Pastor Rick Warren. It completely changed the way I think about ministry and the way we were doing church and just giving people steps to take in the ministry.

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. When we started as a church, for us, the community was pretty much Stone and Taney counties. We were focusing on getting to know the needs and the people in Stone and Taney Counties. Now it's grown to Green, Christian, and Boone Counties. We have people that travel from Dallas, Texas every week... No, I'm just kidding. But we do have people from Springfield and Harrison coming in, so our community has gotten a little bit larger for who we are reaching as a church. We talked about how to go into the community and invite people to be a part of our crowd. That's what we are talking about today. The whole message is *From the Community to the Crowd*.

We looked at the fact that a crowd is not a church. As we are gathered here today, there are a lot of people that are a part of our crowd, but they're not part of the congregation. They've not stepped up and said, "We really want to join this church and be a part of what you have going on here."

Today we are going to talk about the next many of you are taking into the crowd. It's very important... We said between the crowd and the congregation, if someone flips you off in the parking lot on the way out of here today, we want you to assume they are part of the crowd. They are not part of the congregation. If on your way down Shepherd of the Hills today, someone cut you off or they were too aggressive getting here, we want you to assume they are either on our staff... It could have been me. Or they are part of our crowd.

People will often say to us "I know so and so goes to your church and I know the way they act, I know the way they live, I know the type of people they hang around with, I know what's going on in their

marriage, I know the other women he's been with." I hear this around town a lot. "And they call your church their home." I want you to hear that we are grateful for that because they are part of the crowd.

Today we are going to see what Jesus thought about the crowd and how Jesus attracted the crowd. We know that for many of you, your next step is becoming a regular attender of the church. Here's what we know. Everyone in here has a next step to take. Here's what's hard about a church like this. All of our steps are different. We are all at different places. You see some people and you wonder how they got there. Well, they didn't get there because they took one step last week. They're there because they've been a believer for 30 to 40 years. That's not the story for some of you. Your story may be that you've been unchurched your whole life and you don't have any connection to a church or denomination.

I love the people that tell me they are Baptist and when you ask them what that means, they say their grandma was Baptist. I've talked with guys where I've been trying to counsel them out of an affair. I invite them to church and they say they can't come to our church because they are Baptist. I'm like, "I don't think that really matters right now. I think we have bigger fish to fry, to use an Ozarkian term here, buddy. Technically, you don't have a denomination. You need Jesus." That's a big part of it for us. We want you to know that everybody... Life change is typically slow.

We don't want to be that church where we say come see what God is doing here and, by the way, I know this is your first Sunday, but next week we are going to give you a tee shirt and you're going to be serving. Staff doesn't like this part. They're like "Don't give them too long to hang out in the crowd." We are good and comfortable with the crowd. We're good and comfortable with people being here today. They don't know the Lord, they've never placed faith in Jesus, and their next step is from the community to crowd.

In the weeks to come, we're going to talk about a lot of other steps. Some of you been a part of our crowd for ten years. We're inviting some of you today to be regular attenders of our church. Some of you have been a regular attender for ten years and you like being considered a guest for the past ten years. Maybe it's time for you take a little step.

Remember what we said the two goals of this series are. 1) You think through your next step and what step you need to take. 2) This second goal really applies to today. I know a lot of you have seen this before and a lot of you have heard me talk about this before, hundreds of you in here have probably heard this and your thinking *here we go again*. I want you to focus on the second goal. The second goal, as we talk about and look at the scripture today, is that you would think of someone who needs to take a step and you would encourage them, invite them to take that step. It may be a family member, a friend, a co-worker. You know someone in the community that needs to be a part of what's going on here on Sundays.

Next week, we'll talk about moving from the crowd to the congregation. We also don't want a congregation of a bunch a pew sitters. We want people that plug in and begin serving. For many of you, your next step will be on Wednesday night, April 20, which is Home Link. You've been a part of the congregation for quite some time, but you've never plugged into biblical community. Wednesday night is a next step for you.

In a couple weeks, we'll talk about moving from the congregation to the committed and then ultimately, "I'm in Home Link, I've joined a home group, I'm part of what's going on, I'm serving," and you become part of the core. The core of any church are those who are going back out into the community and inviting people along.

I always love asking people what they think about church. When I'm meeting someone new, I don't usually lead out with "Come to Woodland Hills this week." I like to find out if they go to church and if they don't, why they don't go to church. I like to get into their life a little bit.

There are two groups of people we are going to talk a lot about today: the church and the unchurched. When we started Woodland Hills, our heart was to reach the unchurched. Those are people who have been frustrated by church, people who have had a bad experience in church, people who were run out of a church, or people that don't even have a connection to church. They don't have a family connection or a community connection. They don't know the first thing about it. They just know that Christmas is about the Nativity. That's about the depth of their biblical knowledge. Our heart is for that person. We've never set out to be a church where we go gather up other church members from other churches. That's never been part of our heart or part of our goal or part of our desire.

When you ask the unchurched why they don't go to church or why they don't come to a church like ours, here's what you hear from them. These are the three most common. I love this first one because I hear it all the time. "I haven't stepped foot in church since ____." I usually get an age attached with this one. "I haven't stepped foot in church since my grandma passed away. The funeral was the last time I was in a church." "I haven't been in church since that terrible church experience. I looked around and thought *this place is so full of hypocrites, I'm done.*"

Would you raise your hand if you've been part of a bad church experience? And it's not this church, I'm hoping. Some of you are thinking *Why doesn't he ask if we are part of one right this very second?* I'm not going to ask that one. But, you'll get a lot of reasons why people haven't stepped foot in church.

This is one of my favorite ones. "I'm not going to church because I'll be struck by lightning." Raise your hand if you've heard someone say that. "I'm the greatest of sinners. If I go into a church and they see me..." This is what I love about... We have to be very careful. This is part of training a congregation too. We're talking about moving from the community to the crowd, but I also need to work with the congregation today with that second goal of this series. When someone comes to Woodland Hills and you're shocked their here, it's a bad response to gasp and say, "What are you doing here? I know it's a castle, but technically, we're a church right now. Did you know that?"

This is small town Branson. Some of you see people from your past and you just turn and walk away. "The last time I was with them, we were smoking stuff that is only legal in Colorado and listening to music we shouldn't have been listening to." That's what I love about this church. The heart of this church is when the unchurched show up, we celebrate. We're excited you're here.

How about “I don’t want to get yelled at anymore.” Some grew up going to church... this is a lot of the unchurched in Branson. I meet a lot of those that say, “I was yelled at so much from a preacher when I was growing up.”

Growing up, I remember one evangelist that came to our church. One year, his tone completely changed. He was nice, kind, gentle, loving. What happened? He shared with our congregation. He said, “I was at a revival.” Remember revivals? “And a young man came up to me. It was a Tuesday night and he’d had a bad day at work. He said, ‘Pastor, please tell me that tonight isn’t going to be a night where you just yell at us all night. I’ve been yelled at all day; I could use a little refreshment.’” He’d never thought about that. What joy is it for you to bring your lost family and friends to a church and have us scream and yell at them for 30 or 40 minutes.

These are the reasons I get for not coming to Woodland Hills. “The music is too loud.” “The church is too big.” “They have too much fun.”

What’s funny is these are the exact reasons why the unchurched come here. “The music is too loud, it’s chaotic, and it’s crazy. Turn it down.” Whenever someone blames me for the music volume, I say, “That’s completely Russell. I have nothing to do with that.” When someone comes back to the booth and tells him to turn it down, I’ve taught him how to fake turn down the button. That doesn’t feel right. That feels like hypocrisy a little bit right there.

We heard this when we went from one service to two services. People didn’t want to go to two services because they wouldn’t know everybody. That’s okay. We’re okay with the crowd. We can grow larger and smaller at the same time, as we are going to see in a second. I’ve heard some people ask why so and so doesn’t come to church anymore. They do, they just don’t come to your service time or sit in your region of the theater. We’re okay with too big.

Then they have too much fun. I love what our student pastor says. He goes “If you don’t like lots of people and laughter, you’re probably not going to like heaven.” Let that sink in for just a little bit. I think both are going to be there.

1. Jesus attracted large crowds.

Jesus was in large crowds a lot. Here’s what the scripture says in Luke 14: 25. ***Large crowds were traveling with Jesus...*** If you see this in movies and in pictures or posters at Christian book stores, you always see Jesus at the front as he’s walking down the path. There are always six disciples on his left side and six disciples on his right side and then the Forest Gump group running behind him. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? That’s not the picture that scripture paints.

Look at what scripture says about the crowd in Luke 8: 42. ***As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.*** It was a mob. It was chaotic. There was so much going on, so many people, so many interested parties gathering to hear what he was saying. When he would try to get away from them, the scripture says they would follow him. He couldn’t get away from them to the point it almost crushes him.

We can get this way a little bit with crowds. “The crowd is too big, the parking lot is too crazy; why would I want to go and deal with that?” It’s because of the second point.

2. Jesus loved and ministered to large crowds.

Jesus didn’t run away from them. He was actually moved when he saw them. I’m working on this one personally. This is one I need to deal with a lot more because the staff around here jokes with me that I’m doing everything I can to keep us from going to a third service. So whenever you hear a message where I’m angry or mad, or going at it, that’s to keep us from going to a third service. That’s not true.

We just know that 9:00 and 11:00 are the sweet times for the unchurched. Even if they are unchurched, there’s something in their mind that they have to go between 9:00 and 11:00. You heard me a couple of weeks ago ask how many of you would want to do a 7:30 service and like 12 hands went up in the first service. So, we did it at 8:00 and 10:00 and 12:00 and some of you were like “You better not move 11:00! I am not hitting the buffet after the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Baptists. I am going to get there when I get there. You wrap this thing up no later than 12:10.” Some will tell us to quit catering to people. We will cater to the crowd with service times because service times are nothing biblical. We love 9:00 and 11:00. We’re trying to figure out how to accommodate more people as we get to the 2,000 mark without moving off the 9:00 and 11:00.

This one is for the congregation right here. I want the unchurched here to hear this and process this, but I need to speak to the church for just a little bit with this point because this is for me big time as well. I tend to get overwhelmed by large crowds. I tend to try to sneak away from them as fast as I can, and I don’t want that to be my first reaction.

We were talking about how we could get people to go over to fast pass parking. One of the ideas we had... I thought it was a great idea that our team came up with. If you would commit to a year over in fast pass parking, we will give you a free Fitbit.

Jesus loved and ministered to these massive crowds. And when you read in the scripture about Jesus feeding 5,000 people, commentaries will show you that they typically only counted men in that day. They didn’t count the family gathered around the men. So some of these crowds were up to 15,000 people. That’s a ton of people.

Look at what the scripture says in Matthew 9: 36. ***When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*** Now there is a man in my life... I’ve had two men in my life. One of them has gone to be with the Lord. But, there is another man in my life who has taught me how to do this right here. This hasn’t been me and I’m a pastor. The shepherd part can be very challenging. His name is Joe White. He’s on our teaching team here.

I’ve watched Joe work with crowds. It’s overwhelms me to watch him work with crowds. One of the first crowds he took me to was almost 15 years ago.

He said, "Come with me on a trip. I need your help to do some ministry." I asked where we were going and he said, "We're going to Ohio to a maximum security prison."

The room was full. There were 500 to 600 guys. They were murderers and rapists with life sentences and I'm sitting there going "What do you want me to do? Pass out note cards and pens?"

He said, "No, when I'm done... I'm going to build a cross and present the gospel." His heart is for this group right here in a way I've never seen. He said, "I want you to come up, stand with me, and hug every guy."

I said, "And get shanked? Are you kidding me?"

This is the scene. Afterwards... You know if you've sat through a Joe White talk. He's hitting the emotions. He is a guy of mercy. He's presenting the gospel, and they start lining up. I'm the first one they come to and as I hug them, I'm going "Come here, big boy. I got ya. This is how Jesus would hug. Now move it along." There were three pats per person. I looked over at Joe... You have to be careful around Joe. I'm just warning you. If you ever come up here, be prepared for him looking at you. He looks through your eyes and into your soul. He grabs you by the back of the head, presses your forehead up against his, and puts cheek to cheek. I'm watching him embrace these guys and love these guys and I'm just hugging them with three pats and sending them on.

Harassed and helpless... The crowds that followed Jesus were lost. They were harassed and helpless and Jesus was moved by this. He had compassion on them. If our hearts, as a church family, could be to not rush to the parking lot to get away from the unchurched people so they don't get to the food before we do... Our hearts should be look around at all the people in here that are harassed and helpless. Who can we find? Who can we connect with? Who can we go up to and embrace?"

I feel I've gotten better since that day, 15 years ago. I want to see the crowd and not figure out ways... A lot of churches program to stay small. We don't want that. We want the good news of Jesus to go out into our community so we bring them into the crowd.

Look at what the next passage says in Matthew 15: 30. **Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.** The harassed, the helpless, the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others. To me, this is a picture of who the church should be reaching, and not seeing them as a problem, not seeing them as too much to handle, not seeing them as too difficult. These are the people that laid at the feet of Jesus and he healed them.

Would that this be our attitude towards the crowd that gathers here at 9:00 and 11:00 every week. It's the heart of Critter Street, Wild Woods, Crew, Roots, Organic, and The Fort. We're gathering a crowd. We hope that if we are a loving church, a church that loves like Jesus loves, we should see the harassed, the helpless, the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others showing up here week after week and we are excited that they are here. This is our heart. This is what I'm asking the Lord to work on more in me.

3. Jesus engaged large crowds with interesting stories and practical teaching.

He started with meeting their need and then he would teach them deep truths about the kingdom with an earthly story. We call them parables. All the 38 parables start like this: “The kingdom of Heaven is like...” Then he would share.

I met a lady at a banquet in Springfield a couple of weeks ago. We were talking about churches and everything. She was telling me about her church. She said, “We found a church my husband really likes because it’s an intellectual church. We’re not really big into the story telling churches.”

I felt a tad wounded, but I thought *It’s not about me; let’s talk*. Please don’t be offended by what I’m about to say, but I’m thinking an intellectual church in the Ozarks... I’m not offending you; I’m here and I’m pastoring, right? We’re trying to reach people from Arkansas all the time. That’s a joke; don’t get offended.

As soon as she said they prefer an intellectual church, my immediate thought was *that’s a small church*. Again, we’re talking about the unchurched. I don’t walk around Branson finding unchurched, lost people looking for an intellectual church. There may be some and I get that, but that’s not the majority of that first circle of the community. I don’t walk around with someone and then invite them to church and they’re like “Yeah, but I’ve been thinking about this. I just lost my wife, my kids won’t talk to me, and I’m an addict. I really need a church that will take me verse by verse through Revelation.” I just offended all the Bible Study Fellowship people in the room. I’m great with all the Bible studies that we have around here that take believers deeper. I get that they do reach the unchurched, but we have to think about this from a community perspective. What are the needs in our community and are we reaching them? In 20 years of ministry, I’ve never once met one person that goes “I’m so frustrated. I can’t figure out how to correlate the Book of Daniel to the Book of Revelation.” I don’t hear that. I know I’m offending some right now and I’m not sorry.

I just want you to hear who the community is and how we teach Jesus to the crowd. Jesus used interesting stories and practical teaching. The scripture says this in Mark 12: 37. **...the large crowd enjoyed listening to him**. Hopefully, the kids go away from Critter Street and Wild Woods today and they want to come back. They learned about Jesus and it was fun and exciting. May that always be our heart.

Again, to just encourage our congregation. Be the one who goes after the harassed and the helpless. Be the one who goes after the lame and the mute and the crippled, and many others. We have folks in our church... I don’t know if you’ve seen it, but there have been plenty of times – it seems like every other week – that people leave in the middle of the service in a very demonstrative way. Something is said or they’re frustrated and she picks up her purse, puts it under her arm, and walks out.

What I love are the church members that get up and go after them to find out what is wrong. Here’s what I give you permission to say. Engage them and say “Let me just tell you that he ticks us off all the time too. After a while, you kind of get used to it. You find out that he really does care for you and love you.”

“Sometimes he says things that he doesn’t really fully think about before he says them. Sometimes his filter is turned off. We prefer his filter on, but you caught him with his filter off.” Go up to them. We have such a mob mentality today and politics is a big part of this. We see a group that we don’t agree with or a group we don’t like and we are now the opposition. Rather than finding how you can go and find out who they are and share with them.

For some of you, maybe your application to this message is to actually go up and talk to someone who will be voting for Bernie Sanders. I still think that one of the best ways that you can minister to a Bernie Sanders voter... I might as well go there because we’ve covered a lot. I’ve picked on Trump; I’ve picked on everybody. But, just get some brown paper bags with lunches in them and just walk up to them while they are picketing and say, “Hey, here’s a free lunch.” And your follow up line would be “I know you were already expecting this.” I’m just trying to help. Come back next week and there will be a Hillary joke. And then we’re just going to cycle them: Hillary, Bernie, Trump, Cruz, and... Oh yeah, Kasich, that’s right. That’s the joke right there.

4. Jesus withdrew from large crowd to be with a small group.

We’re going to talk about the next couple of steps, but this message isn’t about the next couple of steps. How can a church grow larger and how can we minister to crowds? It’s because we grow larger and smaller at the same time. We call them home groups, but the scripture says this about Jesus in Matthew 26: 20. Jesus would withdraw from these large groups and, ***When evening came,*** (speaking of the Last Supper) ***Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve.***

Within the twelve that he would hang out with, he had an inner circle of three. It was Jim, Pete, and John. Here’s one of the times we read about that in scripture in Matthew 26. ***36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him...*** So he would get with a small group and then an even a smaller group yet.

5. Jesus withdrew from large crowds and small groups to be alone and pray.

This is important because Jesus would engage, do ministry to large groups, speak to large groups, but we have to remember this and we read this in the gospel of John. Jesus didn’t say a word that his Father didn’t give him. So his time alone with his father to have fellowship with his Father.... He not only wouldn’t say a word unless his Father gave it to him, but it was not just what he said; it was how he said it. It was his content and his delivery.

The scripture says this in Luke 5: 16. ***But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*** From the crowd to the small group to our one on one time with our heavenly Father.

In dealing with the crowd, let’s do something very practical as we close this out and as we talk about reasons why people visit.

Reasons people visit

The number one reason people visit a church is because they were personally invited by a family member or a friend.

This week, we were having lunch and the server brought bread over to our table. I don't know what happens inside of you when bread shows up to the table. What happens inside of me is "*Can I get a halleluiah? Can I get an amen? It feels like a Holy Ghost rolling through me...*" That's how I feel. And this bread was warm and the butter was soft. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? Shame on you restaurants that bring me butter that looks soft and I take the knife and I try to spread it and it's frozen. You are of your father the devil and a child of darkness. You soften that butter.

My heart is just racing at this particular restaurant as I'm cutting into the bread and I've got the butter going. The server hasn't even left the table yet. He asked me when our service times were. As I'm focused on spreading the butter on the bread, I quickly say "9:00 and 11:00."

He walks away and Amy goes, "Ouch! That's what we in the biz call low hanging fruit. He just asked when our service times were and you didn't invite him to church."

That was a missed opportunity right there. When he came back up to the table, I sat the bread down and I said, "Hey, my friend, the service times are at 9:00 and 11:00, but more than that, we would love to see you there."

Maybe he's here right now. I hope he is. He said, "Yeah, I haven't been to church in while." Then he tells me it's because of a bad church experience.

I just had one recently and 15 years ago, he and I went through a bad church experience together. I was on one side and he was on the other. I thought, *Wow, Father, you can heal! This is what you do. It's not time that heals all wounds; Jesus heals all wounds.* That was 15 years ago, so I'm hoping that with those that we had the same issue with eight years ago, we can find healing there. So, I have to have eyes ready because a personal invitation is the number one reason people visit.

Let me give you some others. They visit because of the holidays: Christmas and Easter. They visit because of funerals and weddings. Another reason they visit is a big one. They get married... A lot of young people get married and they stop going to church. It's their morning to hike, their morning to go do stuff before work starts up again on Monday. Then they have this little thing we call a baby. After they have the baby, they realize they aren't going to be able to do this on their own. What they end up doing is coming to church. We put so much energy into Critter Street, Wildwoods, and Crew because of so many people visiting.

I met a lady in the first service who is a single mom with four children. During the whole time we talked she was just frazzled. I'm told her "You're church family is here and we want to support you." I introduced her to as many people as I possibly could. Raise your hand if you're a parent in here and you are frazzled. That's another reason people visit.

Here's a reason people stay. The reason people will come back is because of experience. Research tells us people make their decision to come back to a church within ten to twenty minutes of stepping foot on campus, which is a huge relief to me. That's because it's you. You're the reason they come back. I'm the reason they leave. They feel the authenticity.

We've shared with our greeters often not to hug everybody. We had some huggers for a while. They hugged everybody whether then knew them or not. Some didn't want to be hugged. Some people won't come back because they felt smothered. It's this line that we have to deal with in helping and encouraging and being a church that has life and friendliness. People say they come back because what they experienced here was real. I've said this multiple times over the last few months. Woodland Hills, you excel in this area. You're great at this. And you have the tee shirts to prove it. Some of you want to know how to get a tee shirt. That's in the next steps to come. We can't afford tee shirts for all attenders.

Why do people leave? We get all sorts of reasons on this. "There are too many hypocrites." "It was too showy." "Painful." "Didn't agree." "Too many political jokes." "I could tell the pastor's bent." "I could tell the music guy was this." "I've seen this guy before." You get all sorts of reasons why people leave.

One of the reasons we know people come and go is this thing Gary Smalley referred to, when we first started the church, called unresolved anger. We would be in elder meetings 14 years ago and he would say, "On the guest card, after you fill in your name, address, where you're from, how many kids you have, and your age, I want a little box at the bottom that says *I have unresolved anger.*" I didn't want to question my elder, but I think that's a lot to ask out of a first time guest.

He said, "We have to ask it because if they are coming from another church and they have unresolved anger and they don't deal with that church or that pastor or what's going on back there, that anger will resurface here."

We teach this all the time in marriage. If you hate your ex-husband, your next marriage ain't going to go that well. That anger will resurface in this marriage. "He's a much nicer guy." Yeah, because you're dating, because you're newlyweds, because he's walking on the proverbial egg shells, but one day that will dry up and if you haven't dealt with the unresolved anger, it'll come back at you. There are so many folks that leave because they are frustrated. They got mad at that church and now they're here and they want to be a part of this church. You do need to resolve that anger before you try to join here.

Other people leave because they're called somewhere else. We get that. Some people leave because they move to another part of the country. We always try to help people. If you're moving to another part of the country, our church always tries to help you find a new church to plug into.

Five key differences between church shoppers and the unchurched.

This list comes from my friend Carey Nieuwhof. If you were here last August, Carey spoke in our Orange series. He put this list out earlier this week and told him I was in the middle of studying for Sunday's

message and this list fits perfectly, so I was going to use it. He was glad to help. These are the five key differences. Our heart has always been to reach the unchurched. We've never set out to be... And there are all sorts of clichés for this like "sheep stealers." We don't desire to take from other folks.

1. Church shoppers think their job is to evaluate. The unchurched are looking to learn. We've seen plenty of this. Early on in the ministry, I used to sit down with every person and every yellow pad they had. They wanted to give us an evaluation of the message.

I used to sit down with this one lady. I had a hard time sharing this in the first service because I still get a lower lip quiver and my heart is not good in the way I share this. It was one of my biggest blunders in ministry. It was sin on my part. I confessed it to her. I confessed to the congregation.

Every week, she would come in with her yellow pad and just give me list after list of everything that needed to change. I wore out. Usually you have to do that with every church member, but those are the pastors that stick around for a year or two. Finally, I snapped in one meeting. I said to her, "You may talk to your husband that way, but you're not going to talk to me that way." As soon as it came out of my mouth, I thought *Oh boy, that wasn't all that pastoral. I don't know if she'll stay at the church or if I want her to.* She left and called an elder meeting. It was bad. I apologized. My heart in that was not good.

We want you to be a part of the church, not come every time and evaluate. Don't we evaluate every time we leave the church? We evaluate the music and the sermon, instead of what Jesus is doing in us. How is he changing us?

2. Church shoppers move quickly from love to hate. Why? It's because of the unresolved anger. Even if it's subtle, it's there. You love it for a while, but then you hate it. The unchurched warm up to you gradually. I want you to get that. They warm up to you gradually. We understand that. Life change is typically slow. If this is your first Sunday here, we're not going to give you a shirt today and tell you to serve next week. We're okay with that. We're not pressuring you... We want you to take the next step and keep taking steps.

3. Church shoppers want their church to be like the last church that they just left. Unchurched people don't. This is another one where you get list after list of people... I don't get it that much anymore, but people would come up and say, "Do you know what this church needs?" And they would give me all these things to do and stop doing. The whole time they're talking, I'm thinking *You're explaining a church 1.3 miles from here. You're explaining a church 2.4 miles from here.*

This has been a joke around here for a while and I think it's still acceptable to say it. We want to put a button on our church website that says "Complaints and Suggestions." When you want to voice a complaint or have a suggestion, you hit that button. When you hit that button, it sends you to the website of First Baptist Church Branson. That's terrible, but I can say that. I love Neil. Neil would probably put a button on First Baptist's website, sending them down here. What if you had a website for what each person was complaining about? We don't want to feed the church shopping culture.

4. Church shoppers blame the church when things go wrong in their personal life. The unchurched take responsibility. This is what's so refreshing about the unchurched in our crowd today. When their marriage is falling apart, when their family is falling apart, when they've lost their job, when they've declared bankruptcy, when they gone through foreclosure, they're singing Chris Stapleton's *Ain't nobody to blame but myself*. They get it and they want answers.

When you take a church person and they go through counseling, they're like "Ryan doesn't know what he's doing; it didn't work." Yeah, but you didn't go into our counseling center with an open heart to have your life rocked by God. You went in there so you could tell people you tried everything and you can hook up with your new girlfriend or boyfriend. We get that. The church shopper will say "If my life ain't working out, it's because that church doesn't care." Come on; it's time for you to start taking personal responsibility for your life.

"My marriage is falling apart and they have a program that's not working for us anymore." That's because you're not showing up. R.G. and Karen will tell you how many times they've sat at Panera Bread, waiting for someone to show up for Marriage 911, who made an appointment and didn't show up. Don't be that person. Honestly, we should be refreshed by the attitude of the unchurched. They get what's going on in their heart and life and they're not blaming people. "That church is so large they don't care about me." It's time for you to step up and take responsibility.

5. Church shoppers want to lead THEIR ministry. Unchurched people want to get involved in THE ministry. I see this a lot. It doesn't happen as much anymore, but people would bring me their tape or their DVD or their book in their first week here and want to lead a class about it. To which I go "Hi, I'm Ted and your name is? We need to get to know you a little bit." They want to find a church that will take on their passion and their particular program or plan.

Here are the steps that we want to give and close with today. Church shoppers, you are a different church every year or two and you've not set down roots. Maybe your next step is to stay put. Take personal responsibility for your life. What are you teaching your kids that you keep dating the church, but won't commit? This is big one for Amy and me. We want Corynn and Carson to grow up loving not only Jesus, but also his bride.

This is why next week we are going to move from the crowd to the congregation. I want my kids to grow up with a deep love for the local church. They aren't going to get that if I'm finding a new church every year. They're not going to get that if I get mad at a church and go to the next church. They're not going to get that if the pastor says one thing or twenty that bug me and I'm going somewhere else. They're going to get that we go and feed this consumer mindset of whatever is going to fit our schedule and our time and our plan best. We want you to consider staying put. I have to be honest with you. It may not be in this church that you stay put. It may be another church and we're great with that. We're not saying we're the only church in town. We want you to find where you can serve and stay put, and you can follow Jesus and take your next steps.

The last one is for all the unchurched in here. You've never been part of a church. You've not placed faith in Jesus. You're thinking your next step is salvation. Yes, we present to you the clear gospel of

Jesus Christ that you are a sinner and Jesus died and rose again for your sins. If you will confess with your mouth and believe in your heart, you will be saved. We believe this and we want that to be your next step today.

I've talked to people this week that have said, "I believe that, but I'm not ready to take that step." I just want you to hear this. You may not hear this at a lot of churches. We're great with your next step being becoming part of this crowd. We would love to encourage you to take the next step of continuing to seek, continuing to search, continuing to ask questions, continuing to learn. We want to be that church. We want our crowd to always know there is a place for them here as they move from the community to becoming a regular part and a regular attender. You won't hear a lot of pastors encouraging people to become a regular attender, but we want to encourage you to plug in to what we're doing on the weekend here at Woodland Hills.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we do thank you for our time. I do pray for all the unchurched that are here today. They don't have a bad church experience, they don't have any church experience, they don't have any denominational pull in any direction, but someone invited them and they're truly asking the questions. I pray that they would learn more of what it means to take a next step towards Jesus in this series. We're grateful for what you're doing here.

For those who have blamed churches or pastors or leaders or small groups or Sunday school teacher or classes for years and they've harbored this unresolved anger and resentment in their soul, I pray that today would be a time they would clear that out and take personal responsibility for their heart and the resolving of their anger. I pray that they would cry out to you and guard their hearts above all else, the wellspring of life, and that they would no longer blame the church, but get serious about following you.

We're grateful for what you're doing here. Continue to use Woodland Hills to reach this community. Give us new ways to do that. Give us fresh perspective and ideas as we stay true to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.