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## Next Step

### Part 3 – From the Crowd to the Congregation

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We started a new series a couple of weeks ago and if you missed it, you need to go back and listen to Ted's message because it was phenomenal. The new series is *Next Step*. So, what is your next step? We believe everybody has a next step. Last week, Ted covered the community to the crowd. Today, I'm going to cover *From the Crowd to Congregation*. What's exciting is that Ted asked me to share this part because I can resonate with this entire circle idea. I've been in the community, I've been a part of the crowd, I've been a part of the congregation and committed, and now I'm part of the core. We all have a next step.

I want to genuinely apologize. I love getting to be a part of the teaching team, but I know for me, sometimes I can get up here and just sit at the core. I can even speak language from there and forget that there are a lot of you in here that are from the community or the crowd. I'll use big words like soteriology or hamartiology, words that when I wasn't a believer, I would have wanted to punch somebody in the face for using because they were speaking this Christianese that I didn't understand. For that, I apologize. I think sometimes I assume that everybody is where I am and I forget that God has done this 16-year sanctification process in my life and he has brought me on a journey.

As a matter of fact, I grew up with a drug problem. That's right, my grandmother drug me to church every Sunday. It was actually Santa Sophia Catholic Church in Spring Valley, California. As I'm growing up at this Catholic Church in Spring valley, California, I walk into the church, I see people praying to Mary. Growing up, my only idea of Jesus was this dead man on a cross. Somehow, in my mind, I knew that he was connected to God, but I didn't understand the connection and I definitely didn't understand the personal relationship piece. All I saw was a dead man. I didn't see a man hat was buried and then resurrected. I never caught that. I did learn a lot of aerobics at my Catholic church; that's for sure. It drives me nuts when people say, "I love it when Catholics get it" because I love it when Christians get it.

I went to CCD classes, I was baptized as a baby, which I don't recall at all and I'm going to explain that here in a second. I grew up seeing this every Sunday and doing the aerobics and walking through the whole process and it just never clicked. I never understood that Jesus wanted to have a personal relationship with me. So, like a lot of you who walked in here today, I had an idea of God, I thought there was a God out there and I thought somehow this man on the cross is connected to him. I just didn't know how that was.

I went off to college at Boise State University where I was a walk-on basketball player. Sure enough, in my sophomore year, I'm BWP. For those of you who don't know what BWP is, it's Bench Warmer Posse

all day. I'm riding the bench, knowing I'm not going to get any playing time. So, I'm doing what other non-believing basketball players are doing. I'm just checking out the girls that are walking into the game. Sure enough, this sophomore gymnast from Minnesota walks into the game and I'm like, "Who is that?" I nudged my teammate, who was a freshman, who knew her because they did freshman athletic orientation together.

I was like, "Bro, hook me up."

He's like, "No, no, no. She's a Christian."

I'm like, "What do you mean she's a Christian?"

"No, she believes in God."

I'm like, "Bro, I believe in God."

He's like, "She hasn't even kissed anybody."

"You don't get to college without kissing a dude."

"I'm for real; she's like legit Christian."

We were at an athletic function. We'll just call it that. Later that night, after the game. We were hanging out at this athletic function and sure enough, she shows up. She has no red type of cup in her hand. She has a water bottle. I was thinking, *Maybe she really is a Christian*. So, being the confident, cocky athlete that I was, I walked up to her and went "Hey, do you want to go a date next weekend?" Before I could even get the word date out of my mouth, she was like "Nope."

I did a little recon with my freshman team. I found out where all her classes where so I could catch her in the quad, act like it was totally by chance and make her think she should give me a chance. On Monday, I'm walking across the quad, knowing exactly what class she has next. "Oh, fancy meeting you here. Do you want to go on a date this weekend?" Here answer was "Nope."

By the way, ladies, treasures don't do the hunting; they are hunted for and the greater the treasure is, the harder it is to find. So, I'm thinking, *The hunt is on*. This girl was playing hard to get. My friend assured me she didn't have a boyfriend.

I walk into the student union building after I met her in her quad. They had these tickets to a play called *Heaven's Gate, Hell's Flames*. It was free. As a college student if it's free, you're like *yep, thank you*. I'm going to take her to a church play. I grabbed these two tickets. I knew her class schedule for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I didn't know what her class schedule was for Tuesday and Thursday so I had to wait until Wednesday to catch her in the quad again.

On Wednesday, I catch her in the quad and I'm like, "Hey, I have two tickets to this church play on Saturday." It was October 14, 2000. I go, "I've got these two tickets; would want to go with me?"

She said, "To a church play? Sure, I'll go."

I thought that was my in right there. So, I take her to this church play. The title of the church play is *Heaven's Gates, Hell's flames*. We are having conversations about God on the way out there, but I didn't have any idea what I was about to get myself into. I had no clue. I had been dabbling in church. I had gone to a couple of masses while I was at Boise State. I had gone to church a couple of times. There were altar calls and I'd kind of wanted to come forward. I had this idea of God, but I never really knew God. I didn't understand the severity of my sin, etc. I didn't know how I even felt about this evangelistic approach of this play, but it's funny even saying that because God used it in my life.

This play had all these scenarios laid out, like people living in homosexual lifestyles, people stealing, people who were sexually immoral. The only difference between any of them, between heaven and hell, depended on whether or not they were repentant. If they didn't repent, Satan literally popped out from underneath the stage. There was paper Mache waving behind him and then he'd grab these people and take them down underneath the stage with him. You would just hear this squealing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth. I just sat in my chair in shock and wondered what she was doing. There were three of these six scenarios that played out in these two hours and they were right at me. I'm like, *That's me! Oh my gosh, I'm going to get dragged underneath the stage*. It literally scared the hell out of me.

Then there was a repentant part. If they repented, the spotlight shined on them, and there were all these angels, and the choir was singing, "Hallelujah, hallelujah." Then people go to heaven with Jesus. What's crazy was these angels stood there the whole time. You couldn't see them when the spotlight was off them. One of the sweet girls standing on the side... Their legs are locked for two hours. All of the sudden, one of them just fainted. Then I was really freaking out. *Oh, snap, God just struck her down. She needs to repent, hypocrite. You're up there singing with the angels and you got stuff in your life*. But, I know I'm a hypocrite the whole time.

Sure enough, at the very end of this play called *Heaven's Gate, Hell's Flames*, on October 14, 2000, they do an altar call. Before the leader of the altar call could even finish, I was up at the front of the stage, snot coming out of my nose, eyes crying. Jesus just came and rescued me that night. Keep in mind this was the first date with this girl. We were driving home and she says, "I thought you were a Christian" and I said, "So did it!"

This is how awesome this girl is. The next week, she connected me with two guys. One was a track coach at Boise State at the time. His name was Innocent Egbunike. He ran in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games and then he was a track coach for Boise State. I didn't know the word discipleship. It was one of those Christianese words that I'll try not to use today. He started mentoring me. We'll use that word.

Once a week, I had to pass his office to get to the weight room. He just grabbed me and started pouring truth into me. Then she connected me with another guy. I didn't even know she was behind the scenes working all this. She just told them that her buddy became a believer that weekend and asked them to start discipling and pouring into me.

Another guy named Keith Herington was a youth pastor down the road at a church in Boise. Keith Herington and Innocent Egbunike started pouring into me for the next four years of my college career.

During that college journey, I bumped into Joe at a Promise Keepers event that he was speaking at in Boise, Idaho. I found out about Kanakuk Kamps. I came out here to Kanakuk Kamps. I was still going through the concentric circles. I was going through the process from crowd to community to congregation.

I started working at a parachurch. By the way, nothing against parachurches, but if you work for a para church, you are not a part of the church. The para church is for the church, the para church is to point people to church, but I didn't get that. I made the justification that because I was working for a parachurch, I didn't need to attend church or be a part of the church. I did my ministry with the youth and then on Sundays, I would listen to a podcast or watch a video or something and never get plugged into the church. I wasn't involved at all. To be honest, I really still thought it was all about me.

The reason I'm telling this story today is so that you know that I resonate with some of you. I wrestled with this whole idea of "Am I in or am I out." I was being a taker of the church and not a giver of the church. There are three things I want to cover with you today as we move from crowd to congregation. They are salvation, baptism, and membership.

### **Salvation (Assurance vs Evidence)**

I told you that in my early college years, I was like "Am I in or am I out. If I die today, am I in." I love the second song the worship team sang today. I can stand up with confidence now and say, "It is well with my soul." Some of you don't know if it is well with your soul. You think *Yeah, I closed my eyes one time and I raised my hand. I think if I die...* I'm telling you there is assurance. In God's word, there is assurance whether or not you will be in heaven. There's a difference between assurance and evidence.

The assurance is found first in Romans 8. ***14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.***

You can't even cry out "Abba Father" unless the Spirit of God makes that possible inside of you. At that point of regeneration, where you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the one that took all of your sins on the cross on your behalf... He lived the life we all should have lived, died the death we all deserved to die. When you believe that the Spirit comes to reside inside of you, that he seals you (Ephesians 1), he lives inside you, and it is only by the Spirit that you are able to cry out "Jesus is Lord."

We see that again in 1 Corinthians. **3** *Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* So, if you've confessed and you've professed Jesus is Lord of your life, not a "get out of hell free" card, you're saved; that's the scriptural assurance.

If you don't know that, then there is some wrestling there. Paul encourage it in Philipians 2. **12** *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...* Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. You shouldn't be like I was in college. "Am I in? Am I going to heaven? Am I going to hell?" I was just so anxious because I didn't know the answer to these questions.

John talks on this in John 16: 13-14. **13** *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.* **14** *He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.*

Here's your assurance of salvation. If you've ever cried out "Abba Father, Jesus, I believe you lived the life I should have lived, died the death I deserved..." If you trust that he took on the sins of the world, your sins, was buried, resurrected, and now is sitting at the right hand of the throne of God, then you are saved. There is your assurance. No one can take that from you.

## Evidence

There is also evidence. We looked at the assurance of salvation, but then I also need the evidence in my life. We are going to fly through these. Not too quickly because I know some of you will want to get all of these. We'll give them to you on the website, Facebook, or something. There is evidence on how you get to heaven, but the question, before I give you those 12 points, is this. If you don't enjoy spending time with Jesus now, what makes you think you would enjoy heaven?

You do realize heaven is all about Jesus: praising him, worshiping him, bowing down to him, right? It's all about Jesus. He is the central figure of heaven. That's what heaven is all about. If your idea is that heaven is a better alternative than hell, you're missing the point entirely. If you don't enjoy spending time with Jesus now, the evidence, why do you think you would enjoy heaven. That's what heaven is all about. If you don't enjoy growing in your walk with him now, sitting at his feet, sitting in his word, spending time with him now, I'm telling you that you are not going to enjoy heaven because heaven is all about Jesus, it's always been about Jesus, and it's never going to stop being about Jesus.

John the Apostle wrote a letter in 1 John. If you want to read through these later, I would encourage you if you are not sure of your salvation. Here is some evidence. We are going to go through 12 of them and they are all in 1 John.

**1. Do you enjoy having fellowship with Christ and his redeemed people? (1 John 1: 3)**

**2. Would people say you walk in the light, or walk in the darkness? (1 John 1: 6-7)**

Are you living in an addiction? Are you living in something where you continually live in it, or are you walking in the light? 1 John 1 6-7 says it's impossible to say your saved and continue to walk in the darkness.

**3. Do you admit and confess your sin? (1 John 1:8)**

I didn't just need grace on the day I was saved. I need grace every day of my life.

**4. Are you obedient to God's Word? (1 John 2: 3-5)**

That doesn't say, "Are you perfect in holding God's word?" No, it's says, "Are you obedient to him?" Part of being obedient is understanding that when you do drop the ball, you confess, and repent of that. That's obedience. It doesn't say, "Are you perfect?" It says, "Are you obedient to God's word."

**5. Does your life indicate you love God rather than the world? (1 John 2: 15)** Do you have a stronger love for God than you do the soap operas and the reality television and the Netflix and everything else?

**6. Is your life characterized by doing what is right? (1 John 2: 29)**

**7. Do you seek to maintain a pure life? (1 John 3: 3)**

If you are struggling with a pornography addiction or you are struggling with a sexually immoral relationship, are you trying to get help? Are you seeking to get out of that? Are you seeking to walk through that? If you have zero conviction living there and the answer to that question is no, then I think you have reason to wrestle with Philippians 2: 12.

**8. Do you see a decreasing pattern of sin in your life? (1 John 3: 5-6)**

Do you remember how I told you the assurance of salvation was the Holy Spirit coming to live inside you? That Holy Spirit guides you, teaches you, rebukes you, and sanctifies you.

Sanctification is a process. We are all a work in progress for those who are in Christ, which means that at the point you bowed your head, raised your hand or whatever, and made the profession that Jesus is Lord...

If that point was ten years ago and you're not seeing a decrease in your pattern of sin, you have every reason to question if you are truly a believer of Jesus Christ. The Spirit gradually sanctifies you. There will be valleys and then there will be peaks and then there will be walls, but he is sanctifying you. There should be a continual growth in your relationship with Jesus Christ until we receive our glorified bodies in heaven.

**9. Do you demonstrate love for other Christians? (1 John 3: 14)**

Joe and I were talking about it this week. The Christian community loves to build leaders up and then just watch them fall. Ted and I had a conversation last week about how many of us just love the gossip of seeing a strong spiritual leader rise up and then just fall. That's the exact opposite of the gospel.

Do you realize that there is a real enemy and it's not anybody sitting next to you today? There is a real enemy that hates you and wants to take you out. And it's not anyone sitting in these chairs today or sitting in the first service because you didn't come to first service because you didn't want to see them. There is a real enemy. Do you demonstrate your love for other Christians? We need to have each other's back. We need to love and build each other up and pray for one another. Nobody is perfect and if we know that no one in here is perfect, why don't we show them grace when they prove us right?

**10. Do you walk the walk versus just talking the talk? (1 John 3: 18-19)**

I had a basketball coach in college that always told us... Because our teammates were always talking about what they were going to do. He would say, "Don't talk about it, be about it." St Francis of Assisi says, *"Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary, use words?"*

**11. Do you maintain a clear conscience? (1 John 3: 21)**

I think a clear conscience is the best witness.

**12. Do you experience victory in your Christian walk? ( 1 John 5: 4)**

Not perfection, but do you see continual growth, continual progression?

According to 1 John, these are evidences. If you can say yes to all of those, I'm telling you there is pretty good evidence that you are a believer in Jesus Christ and you will be hanging out with us in heaven.

## Baptism

So, if you know you are a believer... I told you I was baptized as an infant, right? If you know you are a believer, your next step is to be baptized (if you've never been baptized). I was baptized on January 28, 2001. The reason I know the exact day is because it was Super Bowl Sunday. I didn't care because it was the Baltimore Ravens and I knew there was going to be no offense that day. Trent Dilfer was the quarterback and Ray Lewis was the MVP; that's all I knew. And, they forgot to heat the baptismal pool for me that day, so it was like jumping in Taney Como, but I didn't care because I was being dunked to death and raised to life in Jesus Christ.

At this church, we believe in full emersion. We believe Jesus was fully immersed, signifying death to self and life in Christ. We don't believe in infant baptism, which is also known as Patell baptism. Remember, I'm not try to use those words. We believe that baptism is the decision of a believer. We believe in baby dedication where the members of the church rally around that family and support that family. It takes a village. That's the only thing I've ever agreed with Hillary Clinton on.

Here is biblical evidence for baptism. Matthew 28 says **19 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it is out of biblical obedience that you get baptized.

The next verse is Romans 6. **3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

Faith unites to Christ; baptism symbolizes the union. Baptism is an outward proclamation for an inward transformation. We do not believe that baptism is required to be saved and to be in heaven. I will use scripture to support that. The thief on the cross was never baptized, but we know that he was with Jesus in paradise that day. As you are alive and you became a believer in Jesus Christ, you are commanded by scripture to be baptized.

This wedding ring does not make me married to Stephanie. I can take it off and I'm still married. I just took off the outward proclamation. This is an outward proclamation that when I walk into a room, ladies, I'm taken. My wife's outward proclamation is a lot louder. She looks a whole lot better than I do, so when she walks into a room, I want people to know she's taken. It's the same with baptism. He is mine and I am his. Jesus, here I am. Baptism tells the world that you belong to Jesus.

We see that again in Acts and in Romans. In the Bible, only believers who had placed their faith in Christ were baptized as a public testimony of their faith and identification with Jesus. Baptism always follows salvation, not the other way around. It's not necessary for salvation; it couples and partners with salvation.

Michael Houdmann said this and I love how he put it. *“Water baptism by immersion is a step of obedience after faith in Christ. It is a proclamation of faith in Christ, a statement of submission to him, and an identification with his death, burial, and resurrection.”*

## **Membership**

Now we get to get to the fun part. We talked about salvation, we looked at baptism, and now we get to talk about membership. After my stint here, doing parachurch ministry and not really getting plugged in, I got married and my wife and I moved to Kansas City. We were sitting in a church and we started becoming a part of a church. I won't tell you we were members; we were what the pastor would have described that day as a leach. The pastor begins to describe... Let me explain; it was so powerful and so convicting. I'm just telling you what he said; I didn't say this, so don't get up here and lynch me afterwards.

The pastor got up there and he talked about the body of Christ that we see in 1 Corinthians: the hands, the eye, how important... You are a body of Christ as you are a member of a church. He said that you are not a part of this body if you haven't gotten in covenant membership with it. He said, “You are attached to the body. You come, you hang out with us, you enjoy the fellowship, you enjoy the teaching, you enjoy the worship, and you do all those things. Do you know what attaches itself to a body, but isn't actually a part of the body? Leaches. I looked at my wife and said, “We're leaches.” He went on to support it biblically.

My wife and I became members. I was going to become a member of this church... I was teaching all across the United States with Joe White and Ted Cunningham at Men at the Cross. We were doing all these men's events and I was getting to speak at these men's events. I was thinking I was a pretty big deal, just to be honest, a little bit in my pride. So, I was thinking I would become a member and then help them teach.

That's not what they had in store for me and that's not what God had in store for me. They needed help with the parking team. For four years, they needed help with the parking team. Have you ever been parking cars in Kansas City in the middle of January? Three gloves later and foot warmers, I'm out there freezing. God taught me a lot through that. There was so much beauty in getting to serve that church and be a part of that church. I didn't know that until I had actually gotten out of myself to realize that church isn't about me. Church is all about Jesus and this was an opportunity, whatever it looked like, that I got to serve him.

When we moved back to Branson to start the program that we now run, I told Steph we were going to get plugged in. I called Ted and asked him what he needed. I told him I would scrub toilets or help with high school, or vacuum. I wanted to serve, love, and honor Ted. As soon as we got in, we took the membership class and became members of Woodland Hills right away. By God's grace, Ted said he wanted me to be a part of the teaching team. The countenance in my heart was way different than it would have been had he asked me to do that five years ago. There was no longer an expecting heart because God was doing a work in me as I submitted to the membership of the church.

People will say that there is nowhere in scripture that it says we should be members of a church. That's bologna. It is implied a lot. Look at what it says in Matthew 18. **15 "If your brother or sister sins..."** By the way, this is how you handle conflict. **"...go and point out their fault, just between the two of you."** What that verse does not say is "If your brother or sister sins against you, go to another sister and disguise it in prayer (gossip)." That is not what that verse says. That verse says go directly to them and deal with it between you and them. **"If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'** **17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church...** That's implied membership. You are telling it to the church and if they are not members, then it doesn't matter. **"...and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.** That's another way to say someone who is not a church member. If someone is refusing to be brought back to repentance... By the way, just so you know, we still love Gentiles and tax collectors just as much as those who are inside the church. We love them just as much and pursue them just as much.

Hebrews 13: 17 says, **Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority...** I get such joy in getting to submit to Ted and the elders of this church. I get to lift them up, pray for them, and submit to them. **...because they keep watch over you...** There is a benefit in membership. You get a pastor and an elder group that gets to watch over your souls. **...as those who must give an account.**

Look at 1 Thessalonians 5. **12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you...** Stephanie Watson, Katie Gumm, Matt Gumm, Andy Watson, Ted Cunningham, Amy Cunningham, Corey, Chad, Tom... the list goes on and on of people that are behind the scenes laboring for you so you can come and worship with Jesus on Sunday mornings. Do you know how you could do an amazing job of respecting all these people? Become a member of this church, get plugged into your Sweet Spot, and serve. **...who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.**

One more verse is 1 Timothy 5. **17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.** May we make it our goal to honor and lift up and pray for Ted Cunningham who leads this church. I think pastorship is probably one of the most underappreciated positions, by far. Here's the crazy thing. If some of you saw Ted eating at Top of the Rock or on the Landing... As you would come up with your friend, you would introduce him as the pastor of the church that you attend. When you move in to membership... When I see Ted out and I'm with guests, I introduce him as my pastor. I'm excited and I want to honor him. This is my pastor. I love submitting to him. I love following him. This is my pastor. I get so excited about that. Some of you would introduce him as the pastor of the church that you church-hop to once in a while as you're checking out all the other churches in Branson where you're not ever really committed.

If we would stop dissecting the service, we might begin to learn what God is teaching us. Some of you will leave here today and you'll go "What did you think of Adam's message? What did you think of Luke leading worship?" You instantly start dissecting the message. What you are hindering yourself from is maybe learning what God was trying to teach you. We would never say this, but a couple of years back, a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel preacher's wife said that worship is all about us. The whole evangelical community was in an uproar and couldn't believe that statement was made.

I thought about. Do you know what's crazy? We would never say that because we know worship is all about Jesus, but we do make the same mistake when we leave here, get in our car, and say, "Hey, what did you think of worship? What did you think about the message?" When we do that, we are making it all about ourselves, rather than maybe what God was teaching us.

We'll do this too. "Man, I wish so and so was here to hear this." No, you're here. God wants you to hear it. If the other person was supposed to be here, God would have had him here.

There are four reasons why I wholeheartedly think you should become a member of a church. Even if you are involved in ministry, even if you're doing a parachurch ministry, you should still be involved in a church. I gave you a biblical account; here's another reason.

### **1. We all need accountability.**

I know that none of you in here probably has a wife as awesome as mine. My wife is probably the best backseat driver ever. Out of all the times she's freaked out while I'm driving... There could be a car 100 feet from me and she will freak out. I'm like "Baby, that thing is like 100 feet away. And I have my seat belt on; you don't have to cover me; I'm good." Out of the 200 plus times she's been a backseat driver, there's probably been like one time; okay, maybe two times that she has saved me from a wreck.

Do you know what's beautiful about church membership? It covers us with accountability. Have you ever watched a Humvee go through the Middle East. As they are trying to figure out the bombs and everything else, they have guys standing point on all sides. They have each other's blind spots. They are all looking out for the other person's blind spots. They all have each other's back. So, as much as I might dislike my wife's backseat driving, I need help with my blind spots. Everybody has blind spots. She has saved me from getting into wrecks before. I will give her that. She has also given me a few heart skips. We all need accountability. No one is above accountability.

Then here's the other lie of why we won't become church members. We don't have time. Our lives are so crazy busy that we don't have time to be a member or serve the church. We have to hurry and get out of here and go to Golden Coral and get in the buffet line. There are other things like television shows or whatever you're going to do this afternoon like get out and get your suntan on. We buy this lie that we don't have enough time. Check out this video.

Video plays:

*Ephesians 5: 15-17 – **Be very careful then how you live – not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.** There's no doubt in my mind that one day you and will be accountable for how we steward the gift of time that God has given to us. We either learn how to manage it or the reality is we will soon discover that time is managing us. The Apostle James understood time. He referred to it as a mist or a vapor. King David understood time. He referred to it as a fleeting shadow. Both men of God realizing the importance of maximizing the time and the gift it was that God had given to them.*

*C.S. Lewis, great author and theologian, said that the future is something which everyone reaches at the rate of 60 minutes an hour, whatever he does, whoever he is. You see, people don't have more time than you. They are productive because they are more disciplined than you and know how to manage their time. You see, it's not that you and I don't have enough time to read the scriptures or pray. The reality is it's just not that important to us. You see, as humans, we will always find time for the things that are most important to us whatever that be. Whether it be a significant other, Netflix, social media. One of the great uses of social media will be to prove, in the last days, that our lack of prayer and Bible study was not from a lack of time. It's not that we don't have enough time in our crazy schedules to read the Bible or to sit at his feet. But, if we are to be honest with ourselves, it's just not that important to us.*

I would dare to say it's not that you don't have enough time to become a member of this church. The reality is it's just not that important to you. The bummer is that I don't think you realize you're missing out. It shouldn't be a duty; it should be a delight.

## **2. You all have gifts.**

Every single one of you in here have a gift. Some have more gifts than others, but every single person has a gift and God says they should be used for the benefit and building up of the church. Every single one of you in here have a gift and you get to give that away and maximize it.

Some of you just have some pearly white smiles because you've been doing Crest White Strips for the last month and you could just gleam when people walk in. You could just greet people. Some of you have beautiful smiles. Just greet people when they walk in.

When we were at Silver Dollar City yesterday, it was amazing. They were just smiling. Some were missing a tooth, but still they were smiling. That even made me happier. The first thing I see when I walk in is this smile with no tooth and I'm just happy. My whole day is made right there, regardless of the long lines.

All of you have gifts and you get to use them. I'm just telling you that for me, when I got plugged into the church at Kansas City and then plugged into this church, that's when I started coming to life. God is using those gifts and he wants us to be a part of the church. He doesn't want us to be a leech, a taker.

## **3. We were all created to serve, not take.**

We all know this. We could take, take, take, but still, at the end of the day, we still feel empty. Nothing else is satisfying. That's because Jesus exemplified this for us in Matthew 20 - **28 "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."** We were created to serve, not take.

It's like my three year old. All he want to do is take, take, take right now. But, it's never enough. I'm even explaining that to him now. As you get older and become a parent, you no longer enjoy receiving nearly as much as you enjoy giving. It's what people say around Christmastime. It's so much more blessed to give than it is to receive. You guys would capture that as you became church members. You

step in, you start giving, and you see how God uses you, through him, to impact the lives of others. You start giving instead of taking. It's amazing.

There are two people that I think about when I hear the excuse "I'm only going to be here for a year, so I'm not going to become a church member." "I spend six months as a snowbird down in Arizona or Florida and then six months here. I don't really live here..." I say bologna. I say be all here while you're here. Be a member here six months and then go be a member at your church back home. If you're watching online, be a member at the church where you are. I just showed you biblical support of why you should be a church member.

Jill Jones comes to mind. Jill Jones has a husband that is serving our country abroad, so she is basically a single mom. She's not really a single mom; she has a phenomenal husband, but they don't live with him. He's abroad and they can't be with him right now. She has been so plugged into serving this church. She's serving with me after this service as we go and do stuff with the high school kids at 12:30. She's not being paid to do that. She's only here for one year and she has been completely plugged in.

Another buddy of mine, Garrett Perkins, works for a parachurch ministry. He give nonstop. He comes back and he teaches at The Fort and he teaches at Organic. He's going to be sitting on this high school panel with me because he knows that parachurch is not a justification for not being a member of a church. He knows that, biblically, God has called us all to be members of the church and that's a covenant community. When you come into the covenant and you realize that you were created to serve, not take, watch how much you come to life. When you get to get behind Ted and the rest of the elders and everybody else and you get to serve them and lift them up and champion them and you don't need any credit, watch what God does in your heart. Watch what happens when you stop church hopping and you say, "I'm committed; I realize the message and the music isn't about me; it's all about Jesus. I just want to know how I can serve and stop being a taker."

#### **4. We all need to be connected.**

The Hebrew word is Yada. We were all created to be known; first by God, then by others. When you get into church membership, you're known in a way you never were. That's scares some of you, but I'm telling you that's the healthiest thing ever. You can be connected to someone. You're still part of the crowd, you come to church, and you feel like you're connected. It's not an imperialistic club at all. It's not that we think we're better than you. We don't; it's the exact opposite. We want to serve you, we want to love you, and we want to invite you into membership. There are no rules for being a member. Go to class that's coming in May and learn about it. Know what we believe. Find out why we believe. How do you know you love this church when you don't even know what we believe?

A couple of years ago, I got to go to a premiere out in San Francisco, California, for a movie that was filmed with me and buddy. While we were out at the premiere, one of the directors knew the club pro at Cypress Point. Cypress Point is, if you ask any golfer out there, like one of the most elite golf courses. You can't get on there. There are like 200 members only. The likes of them are Clint Eastwood.

So I'm in this locker room and all of the sudden, I turn a corner and there's a template that has Clint Eastwood's. I was like, "No way; could I put on his hat and take a picture." I'm thinking I'm just going to get a little tour. I take this picture with Clint Eastwood's hat on. All of the sudden, the pro looks at me and says, "Do you want to play a couple of holes?"

I was trying to play it cool. "Yeah, sure, we can go play a couple of holes." Inside I'm freaking out.

He takes me to play a couple of holes and then he takes me to one of their iconic holes. I'm teeing up. This is a par 3, 235 yards. I put it on the deck and three putted. Nevertheless, it was still gorgeous and amazing. The reality is, Johnny Morris, no amount of money can build that. That is God built. That is the Pacific Ocean. That is amazing. The crazy thing is we watch the masters on television and we get to see them play. It's one thing watching it and a whole other thing to be there. It's one thing watching Pebble Beach... I could smell the ocean mist hit this cliff wall and I could feel the sun beating on my face and the ocean breeze. There was a bunch of sea lions on the other side. It was one thing to see it on television, but it was a whole other thing when you got to step in the shoes of what members feel every day.

It's the same thing with church membership. You get to go from being an observer to experiencing God's fullness.

I talked about how you are created to serve and not take, and that you all have gifts, and we are all created to be connected, not just be an observer, with what God is doing. I mentored a kid from the inner city about ten years ago. He was a product of Hurricane Katrina. He came up here and he was living with his granddaddy. I started working out with him every day. He was a super athletic kid. We called him Rock. We worked Rock out all the time. From his sophomore to junior year, he just improved so much. This kid could jump outside the lane by his junior year. Colleges were starting to look at him and he was starting to get some letters and coaches showing up at his games. He was a freakishly athletic kid. We worked out hours upon hours. We spent a lot of time together.

His senior year rolls around and he kind of gets lazy on me. He stops wanting to work out. It was like "I've arrived. I'm already getting offers, so I'm good."

I asked him to go to dinner with me. We pull up to a stop light and I said, "Hey, Rock, I need some advice."

He's a confident high school student. He says, "Yeah, what do you need to know? I'll give you all the advice you need."

I said, "Rock, I've got this friend who is a millionaire. He has a sister and his sister is really poor. She's a single mom and she has a baby. They're eating hot dogs and Ramen noodles every night. She can barely afford to pay the heat bills, so some nights they're freezing.

I could see Rock kind of squirm in his chair; he was getting upset. He was getting really frustrated and mad. He's like, "Man, you need to say something!"

I said, "Well, Rock, that's what I'm asking you. Do you think it's my place to say something? That's not my family."

From Rock's culture, you look out after family.

He said, "Are you kidding me. That's like ten bucks to him if he gives her a hundred bucks a month! You need to say something!" Rock was pretty passionate. He's giving me my advice.

I said, "Are you sure? Do you really think that's my place to say something to my friend?"

He says, "If you don't say something, I will!"

I said, "Alright, Rock. That millionaire is you. You are so talented, you have so many resources, you have so many gifts, and you're not doing anything with it. You think you've arrived, but you're not doing anything."

Do you know what's crazy? That millionaire is all of you. Everyone in here, God's given you all gifts and you're just hoarding them. What are you going to do? Are you going to run up to Jesus one day with your arms full of your gifts and say "Hey, look at all these gifts you gave me. Isn't it awesome that I kept them all to myself?"

Rock got it that day. He didn't miss another workout with me the rest of the year. I pray you get it today. Not because of anything I say, but just because God's word would stir a conviction in your heart. Maybe you don't know if you're saved. Maybe your next step is baptism. Maybe your next step is seeking out a mentor and starting to get disciplined. Maybe your next step is church membership, which starts in May. But, if you've been coming to this church for three, four, five years and you've never thought about church membership, I pray now is the time. I pray you'd stop being a taker and start being a giver because you have gifts. You have so many gifts to give the church and the body of Christ.

Father God, we thank you most importantly for your word and that your word gives us assurance and evidence of salvation. Your word guides us through baptism. Your word guides us through church membership. God, I just thank you for rescuing an afflicted wonder like myself. Thinking back to where I was and how you brought me on to next step after next step after next step.

I pray for everyone in here today. I pray that whatever their next step may be, they would have the boldness and the courage to take it. I pray that they wouldn't leave here dissecting whatever Luke sang or whatever I said, but that they would leave here asking what you are teaching them, what you are saying to their heart, Lord.

Thank you for Ted. Thank you for the many, many staff members of this church that continually and relentlessly serve this body. We lift them up to you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, and all God's people said... Amen.