

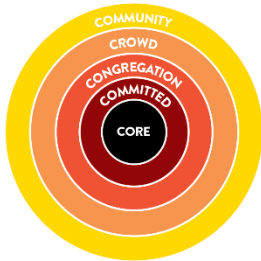


## Next Step

### Part 4 – From the Congregation to the Committed

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're in this series called *Next Step* and we believe everyone has a next step to take. Every single person in this room is on a journey and has a next step. We are hoping two things happen. The primary goal is that you identify what your next step is and take it. That's the primary goal. There's a secondary goal that you would recognize the next step that maybe a family member or a friend should take and you just encourage them to take it. Again, that's not the primary goal. We don't think you should come to church every week and listen to a talk for someone else, but maybe you'll know someone that needs to take a next step.



To give you an example: we've been using these circles. We have a really fancy term for them. They are called concentric circles. These are the steps that people take in the life of the church and the life of the church family, the church body, the body of Christ.

We looked at the first circle a couple of weeks ago and that's the community.

When we started as a church, our community was Stone and Taney Counties. Our community circle has grown a little larger. It's gone down into Arkansas and it's gone up close to Springfield. We've seen that grow and we want to invite people from the community into the crowd. We are comfortable with the crowd. We are great that a crowd is gathered here. Many of you have been a part of our crowd for some time and you're comfortable in the crowd. We love a crowd. We're great with a crowd that smells like marijuana, or that may be a little hungover. We understand that we are going after the harassed and the helpless. We want to be a church that doesn't act surprised when you walk in. We want to have the response of "We're glad you're here, welcome."

We're all harassed and helpless, but we're reaching out into the community. We're trying to bring folks into the crowd. We also know a crowd is not a church; a crowd is not a congregation. Last week... and I think Adam Donyes did a fantastic job with *The Crowd to the Congregation*, asking people to become a member of the church and what it means to say "I actually agree with this church. I'm with this church; sign me up." He talked through salvation and baptism and becoming a member.

We don't want to just have members, we want to have ministers, and that's where we're going today, moving from membership to ministry. We believe every Christian is a minister. You're called to

represent Jesus and to the gospel ministry. So, today we are talking about *The Congregation to the Committed*. Next week we will look at what it means to be part of the core, what it means to be a leader and not just walking out and doing a ministry, but inviting people to join you and replace you.

I've been studying the last week. If you're into studying studies, I encourage you to look up the Harvard Grant Study. It's a longitudinal study that has taken place over the last 75 years. It asks the questions: "How do we grow? How are we most fulfilled? Where do we find happiness?" Now a 75-year longitudinal study is crazy because most institutions lose enthusiasm for it as the years go on. The funding dries up and the people involved die. So, 75 years is a long time for a study. It's had four directors. In 1939 to 1944, they received 268 sophomores from Harvard University and they put them in this study, just asking what makes a person most fulfilled. They are down to under 60 people well into their 80s and 90s. They used men for the study. They followed these men throughout the course of their life. All throughout their life, they would give them these full workups. There were surveys, bloodwork, brain scans. They were trying to figure out where happiness comes from.

At the end of 75 years... I always love all the money and time put into a study that declares something the Bible shared a long time ago. There's another study that we already knew the answer to. Here's what they discovered. Joy is connection. It's being connected. The director from 1972 to 2004 said, "Really, life is a journey from narcissism to connection." You start life being all about yourself. This is what we call the toddler phase. Then you go into your teens and your twenties and it's about making a name or getting a company going or getting a job and making money. You're still a little bit into self.

As you go on, you realize self does not fulfill. Focusing on yourself does not fulfill. They would call these guys in their 70s and 80s and their like "This study is still going on? My life is boring. Why would you want to study me?"

They said, "Well, it's because you are fulfilled. And if you're not fulfilled, we want to find out why." Here's what they discovered. The older you get the more you desire connection. The older you get, the less money matters. It's not about status or the job you have in Branson. It's not the show you had, it's not the albums you cut, and it's not the number of people that showed up to your show. As you get older, you realize there is far more to life than this. The most fulfilled people are those who have the most connections in their life.

I thought about it this week in comparison to this. Really, your next step and the steps you'll take over the next few years are a journey from being self-focused to others-focused. When you're in the crowd, you're asking question like "Do I like this? Let me see more about that that. I don't know how I feel about that." You're evaluating. But, as you move towards the core, as you really plug into and commit to the body of Christ, you find yourself finding fulfillment in others, not yourself.

We're a selfie generation. We love taking selfies. I've told my kids "You don't see your dad posting selfies. You don't see your dad posting seductive selfies." Does anybody know what I'm talking about? I've found some of you posting some selfies and I'm about at a point, as your pastor, where I'm going to put some totally inappropriate selfies out on line that will do nothing but embarrass you. That's my goal.

I've told my kids "If you post seductive selfies, I will... Before I post a bad one, I'm going to become friends with all of your friends. I'm going to make sure all of your friends are following me and then I will scar you for life. That's my goal. I will be in the bathroom... I'm going to do some funky things in that mirror." Some of you are thinking ewww. That's what I want you to be thinking right now. It's going to be bad.

I found some bad ones. This lady thought this was a good idea. "Let me get my picture real quick in front of the camel." You know what? She deserves that. How many of you have ever been bitten by a camel? This one's going to leave scars.

This guy gets the badge and certificate for stupidity right here. What is he thinking? He's not, and he was gored five seconds after this picture, I'm sure.

This next one is why I can't get my wife in the ocean. How many of you think that photo shopped? Yeah, you can't trust anything you see.

We want to move from self to others. We want to move from self-focused to others-focused. As you go through this series, the next step is "How am I moving closer to serving and ministering in the lives of other people?"

Let me tell you some of the statements from the crowd. The crowd says, "I like this church." They stay for a while because they are processing, evaluating. "Are the kids being taken care of? Is it clean? Is it safe? When I drop my children off, are they warmly received, are they welcomed or is it a roll of the eyes?" We're thinking about all of that. How were you treated on the way in? "I like the parking lot situation. I love the single file out after the service. That's always a nice little approach. I like that they are all so kind." And the stress in this church is how many people you should let in at a time as you're leaving. You're processing. "Do I like the music? Is it too loud? Could they turn it up? Do they have good harmony? Does the band need more time to rock out?" "What about the teaching? How long is the service?" You're processing like a crowd would process something.

At some point, we want you to take the next step. This was last week with into the congregation where you say, "I agree with this church." "I may not agree with everything, but what they teach and preach and how they stand up for Jesus, how they proclaim the gospel of Jesus, how they proclaim the blood of Jesus, I'm in. I agree with this church; sign me up."

Today, we want to move from just agreeing with this church to "I service my church." "I am committed to my church." To do that, I want to encourage you to turn to Ephesians 5. Often, if you hear me tell you to turn to Ephesians 5, you're going to hear a message on marriage. But, today, we want to use Ephesians 5, which is primary text on marriage in the New Testament, but we are going to look at as how Jesus loves and cares for the church, this how a husband treats his wife. We are going to look at the theology of the commitment Jesus has towards the church. I want my commitment for the church to model Jesus' commitment for the church. I want to be committed to Jesus and to his body. I want to be committed to Jesus and his people.

We are going to jump right into Ephesians 5. I want us to spend just a little bit of time. I want you to just read Verse 22 a bunch of times. ***22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.*** Just focus. This is the Word of the Lord, you people.

Let me just make this really clear up front. As we talk about submission, it's very clear. In the home, everyone submits. We get caught up with this "wives submit to your own husband" and we stop right there. If you read all throughout the scripture, it's "Do your work as unto the lord." "Submit as unto the Lord." "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Of all the times we see in scripture "as unto the Lord," "as unto Jesus as unto Christ," we get focused on the "submit yourselves to your own husband," but don't leave out the rest of the verse: "as you do to the Lord."

Submission is a Lordship issue. It's your relationship with Jesus that we're talking about. ***23 For the husband is the head of the wife...*** Here's the first bit of theology about Jesus and his commitment to the local church. ***...as Christ is the head of the church...*** This church has elders. This church is elder-led. We are not the head of the church; Jesus is the head of the church.

This is why it's important, when you're selecting an elder and the church is calling on new elders, that you don't find people with agendas. One of the struggles sometimes of finding leaders in the church is we find that when you come to the table with an agenda, it sabotages the "as unto the Lord" part. Instead of coming to the table, as we try to do as elders, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. We want to make sure we are hearing from the Lord. We want the mind of Christ, not our opinions. We all have opinions, but we want to submit to one another about what the Lord is asking us to do in any situation. What is he calling us to do?

For many in here, your bad church experience was a pastor or a deacon or an elder or a bishop or a priest who took on the headship of the church, declared themselves to be the head of the church instead of Jesus, and forgot that Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Jesus is the Cornerstone. Your bad church experience is someone who abused authority.

I brought this Hulk hand to make this point clear. Some people think an iron fist is leadership. I just wanted an opportunity to use my son's Hulk hand. This is what you experienced in church. "I don't like the length of your hair." "You need to clean up." "Where have you been? You haven't been here for two weeks. Do you even love Jesus anymore?"

I saw a video this week of a pastor in North or South Carolina. He completely and totally lost it in the pulpit. He had a complete breakdown. He walked down from the pulpit and he was calling out members. He walked right up to a guy about eight rows in and said "You're the worst member I have!" It's like something you shouldn't be watching, but you can't take your eyes away from it. He says, "Stand up, big boy. You want me to marry you to her? I saw it's on the calendar. Why would I marry you to her? You ain't worth 15 cents."

That's a mental breakdown. He needs counseling or retirement. I don't know which. Please, if I ever start doing that just say "Ted, it's been wonderful; thank you for all you've done. You go be a greeter at Walmart; you're done."

Some of you have seen leadership where they've ruled with an iron fist. That's not leadership and we are going to see how Jesus is the head of the church and **his body...** So we are the body of Christ, which is one of the primary word picture for the church. We're the bride of Christ. That's why it's used in Ephesians 5. We are his body **of which he is the Savior.** So he is the head, he is our savior. **24 Now as the church submits to Christ...** This is very important to understand. Leadership is submission. Leaders are those who know how to submit. They submit one to another. It's not ruling with an iron fist. We are going to see Jesus is the head, the Savior, and we submit to him. Now look at all that that means for his commitment to the church. **...so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

**25 Husbands, love your wives...** Just so you know, for those who hated Verse 22, there is more weight in the text given to husbands on how to love their wives than there is to wives on how to submit to their husbands. Maybe you've heard this before, but for a husband who loves his wife, as we are going to see how Jesus loves the church, submission is a non-issue. Now, if you have the Hulk hand leading in the home, that's when submission becomes challenging. Watch how Jesus loves and cares for the church. This is your third point of theology for his commitment to the church. **...just as Christ loved the church...** And how do we know that? **...and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy...** The church is to be set apart.

I've been at conferences recently where cultural trends are set out there. They present what's going on in the culture and it's shared with leaders as though we are supposed to adapt to the trends. As I was studying this week, I kept coming back to these four words: "To make her holy..." Meaning set apart. We are to be different. We are not to be the same. I was thinking about this. We are to understand cultural trends, so we can minister to the community and invited them into the crowd, but we are not to conform to the cultural trends. There is a big difference.

So, he has set us apart. How has he set us apart? **...cleansing her by the washing with water through the word...** Another kind of a trend that's taking place in churches today are these words like *discussion* and *conversation*. "Do you have an open discussion? Do you have a conversation?" "When people come to your church, are they invited into the conversation?"

No, actually, our church has answers. Hopefully, our answers are not shared arrogantly. We're not the Hulk hand coming down on someone, but when someone's life is falling apart because of twenty years of bad decisions or 30 years of living their life for themselves and not for others, they come to us. They don't want a discussion. They are looking for answers. Here's what happens when a church submits to Christ. We have answers. It's called the Word of God. We declare these answers and we make no apologies about declaring them.

They're like, "Well, you need a conversation; you shouldn't shut people down by giving them the truth." We're not shutting them down. We'll talk about it. Do you remember the song we sang a couple of weeks ago? "Nobody to blame but me." We'll talk about all the consequences of your life and everything falling apart. The tractor falling apart, fishing rods gone, guns in hock, car run down into the pond, all your whiskey poured down the drain... We could talk about all that, but what we want to get to is you and what's going on in you. I love when someone wants to give you some advice. They give you advice on how to live and you're like "As I look at your life, I don't know if I'm taking your advice

right now. Have you submitted to the headship of Jesus Christ? Do you understand it's not about you? If your answers to my problems in life are rooted through the scripture and with Jesus, then I'm listening. But if it's just your opinion, then I'm afraid I'll end up in the same boat you are." I want the truth. You want the truth. Don't we all want the truth? The truth that comes to us through the Word of God. That's how we are set apart. And he cleanses us with that truth. He doesn't beat us down. He's purifying us. He's sanctifying us with that truth.

**27 ...and to present her to himself as a radiant church...** It's that moment in the wedding ceremony where the doors bust open and there's the bride. That's us. Jesus is making us that and we need to be grateful for that, not push against that for more conversations and discussions. Boldly proclaim the truth.

The other day, I heard somebody say, "Yeah, the problem with your Christians is you proclaim the truth as though you have all the answers, and you're not listening to us over here." I would say the not listening part is a bad approach. I've heard people say, "Jesus hung out with sinners, and Jesus was a friend of tax collectors, and Jesus went to places that a lot of Christians won't go today." Please don't forget when Jesus was hanging out with them, he shared some pretty bold statements.

So, it's the approach and the truth. We don't have to choose between the two. We can declare the truth with love. We can speak truth with grace. We become a radiant church, ***without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body... but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—30 for we are members of his body.***

In 1 Corinthians 12: 12, kind of echoing that, the scripture says ***Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.***

Here's where we are going today as we look at our membership covenant as a church. I want to commit myself to Jesus and to the members of this church. That's for each one of us. As we talk about not just being a part of the congregation, but also being committed, I want to share an equal level of commitment. If I am being conformed into the image of Christ, I want to love the church as Christ loves the church. I want to give myself for the church as he gives himself for the church. I want to feed and care for the church just as Jesus does.

We have something at our church that we've had for 14 years. Next Sunday we will be 14 years old. We've had the same Membership Covenant for all 14 years. Some of you have been here for 14 years and you signed this. Some of you signed it ten years ago or five years ago. Some of you signed it a couple of months ago. Some of you may sign it later on this month at Starting Point. Whether you signed it at the beginning or you're going to sign it, this is a good refresher for all of us. What did we commit to and what did we commit to Jesus and to each other when we signed this covenant? We are just going to share a few. We don't have time to give all of them today, but these are the first three on our Membership Covenant that we've had for 14 years.

## I WILL PROTECT THE UNITY OF MY CHURCH

I want to make sure I speak in a way and act in a way that brings unity to this body, not discord.

**...By acting in love toward other members.** The scripture says we rejoice when others rejoice, we mourn with those who are mourning. So, our job around here, our love around here in protecting the unity is making sure we come alongside others and it's not just about us. For many of you, that means you're moving from evaluating the service today to figuring out how you can commit to this church and people around you.

**...By refusing to gossip.** I'm not going to be one who spreads rumors. I'll talk about this a little bit more in a second. I'm not going to be one that listens to rumors. I'm going to be one that protects the unity of my church in the church, in home group, and outside of the church.

**...By following the leaders.** I will submit to the authority of the church, knowing that the leaders and the staff gather around a table and try to figure out what the Lord is speaking to us. We want to be, first and foremost, leaders who walk with Jesus. We don't have our agenda and our opinions driving this church, but we ask the Lord for his plan, for his next step for us.

***Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Romans 14:19*** That means building one another up.

***May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had. Romans 15:5***

So how do you protect the unity of the church? How many of you love watching Whitehouse movies, Secret Service movies? How many of you think a dream job would be being in the Secret Service? I think I would be fantastic at it. I'd have to work out a little bit more. I'd probably have to learn some skills, but I would love it.

I've tried to process why I'm so passionate about this. Amy jokes with me because when we're on dates, I act like I am her Secret Service detail. I walk around with my hand on the small of her back and if someone gets too close, I'll usher them around her with my other hand. She knows I'm always looking for the bad guy.

Sometimes when I'm distracted, she'll ask me if I heard a word she just said and I'll say, "No; I'm surveying." Guys, that will get you out of a lot of trouble if you can make your lack of interest in her story about actually protecting her. It just fell on me one day and it has worked ever since.

I'm always looking around. I'm looking around for something to happen because if something happens, I'm jumping in front of her. I've said this to her over and over again. I'm always looking for something to happen.

It's so true in here. Sometimes we're so looking for something to happen that we hope something happens so we can prove "I got this." I've always had this view of what it would be like to be with the Secret Service.

Let me show this picture. I love this picture of the president with his Secret Service. Please don't disconnect from the message because of the presidential part of the picture, okay? Obey your leaders; submit to their authority; make their job a joy and not a burden. Oh, got a little bit of crickets right there.

The president is not who I would be. I've decided I don't think I would handle the stress of being president. And, with my mouth, I probably would never be elected. Although, we do have a candidate that's proven that wrong. But, the Secret Service guys... That's me. If you ever see me in a suit, I will never have it buttoned. I will always have it unbuttoned because I have to be ready. You never know what's going to happen. I'm always ready at a moment's notice.

I've watched a documentary on this over the last couple of weeks. I'm basically studying. I thought I was studying for a sermon, but I'm thinking I may take the exam. I was so into it. I don't know if you know this about the Secret Service, but it was controversial for years, leading up to Truman, because every year, the congress would have to approve it. The congress thought that if we put that type of security and protection on our president, he would be removed from the people. Every year, it had to be renewed because they wanted the president to still walk outside of the residence and walk around Washington, D.C. among the people. Then tragedy hit and they realized he couldn't be as accessible as they would like, so now it's part of the regular detail.

If you're a child of the 80s, you may remember Ronald Regan walking out and then you remember this next scene when there was an attempt on his life. It was chaos. I had the opportunity to meet this man that I will not name. He took us on a tour of the Whitehouse when I was in college. Just listening to them share their stories... Do you know what a Secret Service Agent says about the president? The say, "My job is to stand shoulder to shoulder with the president. I am his shield." That last line just fires me up. That's Galatians 5: 25 – ***Love your wife as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.***

I told Amy, "Baby, I am your shield." I hope you don't think I've taken it too far in that I actually wear a badge (shows the badge on his belt). Last week, you paid to get into the Legends of Golf tournament. Not me, I just walked right up to the guy, showed him my badge, and walked right in.

Now, the security team met with me after the first service and they told me that I didn't commit the felony, but I was advocating a felony. With my guilt prone nature, I'm holding out my hands to be cuffed while shouting, "I'M SORRY!"

They said, "You can't tell people to impersonate an officer."

I said, "But do you know how many concerts this thing has gotten me into?" That's comedy people, do not... I have to put this disclaimer in there. Do not impersonate an officer. It is a felony offense with prison time. I've made that clear in the second service. We will be wiping the first service off the online stuff faster than Hilary Clinton's email server; I can promise you that. See... Trump and Clinton jokes today. We deliver.



Think about this. You and I stand shoulder to shoulder with the church. We are the shield. Have you ever had a friend, maybe in high school, that you heard someone was slandering you or gossiping about you and the friend was in the room when it was happening?

You ask them what they said and they say, "I didn't say anything."

"I thought we were friends. Why wouldn't you protect me?"

"Well, because they were mad at you, not me and I didn't want to go there."

That's not a friend at all. It even happens in pastor circles. I can be talking to one pastor and he begins bashing another pastor. I hope he tries to bash one of my friends because then the claws will come out. I'm going to risk this conversation and this friendship and this relationship to stand up for my friend because I am his shield. It's called taking the hit.

Over the years, many of you have shared with me how people have gossiped about Woodland Hills Family Church and you said nothing. You just stood there. You weren't the shield for your own church. You didn't stand shoulder to shoulder with us; you just wanted to make sure you left room liked. If I can encourage you, be the shield. Stand shoulder to shoulder with us. When you hear someone gossiping... I'm just wondering... In this town full of entertainers and shows, maybe the next time you hear one of your friends gossip about another show in town, maybe it's your time to be the shield for that show.

### **I WILL SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MY CHURCH**

I'm going to wear the badge; I'm going to protect my church. I am not going to speak ill about people of Woodland Hills Family Church. I will not to speak ill about this congregation because I will be the shield, I will take the hit. I will risk the relationship at this very moment.

**...By praying for its growth.** I need to do this better because I've been praying for the growth to slow down a little bit so we don't have to go to a third service. I need to pray for its growth that more from the community would come to the crowd. I heard from two or three people from the first service. "I just love this being a church where I am comfortable inviting my friends. No matter if they are a democrat or republican, they are going to get a little bit of a zinger at them, but they will ultimately be okay with that." "I love the fact that we walk into that children's area and it's amazing." It's that shock moment that people feel when they walk into our children's program. We always want that.

**...By inviting the unchurched to attend.** You do that so well and that's how the church has grown.

**...By warmly welcoming those who visit.** I've said this a couple times over the last month or two. I said it in the first service and I'll say it again in this one. I just want to encourage everyone to stay for the whole service. When we end this service today, we are going to worship together as a church family. Let me just ask our committed and our congregation. Maybe not worshipping together with your church family might free up a few from the crowd that are in the back that want to get out early... Maybe it's letting them get to lunch before you. The way we welcome one another, the way we welcome others is sharing the responsibility.

***So, warmly welcome each other into the church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified. Romans 15:7 (LB)***

## **I WILL SERVE THE MINISTRY OF MY CHURCH**

Adam touched on this a little last week.

**...By discovering my gifts and talents.** We have the Sweet Spot back there and we encourage you to sign up and get ready to go.

**...By being equipped to serve.**

**...By developing a servant's heart.** By making sure I know my part and I'm plugging in.

***Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others...*** It's not about you making a name for yourself, it's not about you and the role you play; it's saying I'll roll up my sleeves and do whatever. I want to serve. I want to be part of the committed in this body. ***...as faithful stewards...*** A steward there is like a manager. We use the word *steward* a lot to talk about money. We've been given everything. God doesn't own 10% of your holdings; he owns 100% of your holdings. He has given them to you and you're the steward of them. You are to manage them. The 10% back to the church is just recognition of the fact that he owns it all. ***...of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10***

### **Every member is a minister.**

This is what we believe at our church. This is the difference between the congregation and the committed. In a few weeks, we are going to celebrate our graduates here. We view every graduate at this church not as a member, but we feel – and I love how my friend Doug Fields puts it – we are sending them out as ministers. We're sending them out to serve and they need that view. It's not just that you have accomplished something, but now you are prepared to go out and do something, not for you, but for others.

### **Every ministry is important.**

You say, okay, so I'm a minister, but what I do isn't all that important. We believe every ministry is important. We believe it doesn't matter if you made coffee this morning. It doesn't matter if you invited someone to church on Thursday. It doesn't matter if you are in the band. It doesn't matter if you are working with kids out there. It doesn't matter if you're helping people park. It doesn't matter if you're driving a golf cart. Every time you show up and every time you serve, what you're doing is as important as everything else is. Every ministry here is a 10. There isn't a 10 ministry and an 8 ministry. It's all important.

I have a couple of modern day parables to help with this. Let me show you one of my favorite tracks in the country. This is Bristol Motor Speedway. Do we have any NASCAR fans in the house? A bunch of rednecks. I'm a redneck; I love NASCAR. I've never been to a race, but this is the track I love. They say you want to sit up high, but I want you to look at all these spectators. To me, this feels a lot like the church, sitting up watching 38 guys run around the track and their pit crew, which are all the ministry teams, hoping someone crashes.

The reason I love Bristol is attitudes do tend to flare up. No car leaves here unscathed. They all bump the wall and they all have a tough time.

I always think about all these people watching this one guy. There is always the driver. This is Kyle Bush. Do we have any Kyle Bush fans in the house? Do we have any haters of Kyle Bush? People that hate Kyle Bush are passionate. They are the ones that have the helmet with the two beer cans on it and the straw coming down out of it. That's a NASCAR attendee right there. We're at the end of the race and he has won and we all cheering. We're all here to cheer him on.

Nope, that's not the church. The church is this right here. Last week, I had an opportunity to actually get into Kyle Bush's car. He's driving at Talladega today. There's nothing like a sweater vest getting into a NASCAR. Nothing screams credibility as a racer quite like a sweater vest. I loved posting this picture and I love how so many people from Woodland Hills, after seeing this picture last Sunday, were like "I can't believe you fit in there." To which I'm like "Enough with the fat jokes. Sure my stomach is coming up over the steering wheel right there."

I want you to know that every time you show up and serve, you're in the car going 200 miles per hour around the track. You're not up in the stands. You're not the spectator. You're on the track. You may have the Skittles car, you may be in a different car, but you're on the track. You got in the car and you're racing. But, for a lot of you, you're in the stands watching, hoping that everything goes well and that you get to watch it, sucking away in your beer.

Let me ask you this question. How many of you have an artist like a musician or a band that when you're in the car alone or you're at home and you have the headphones on, you become that artist and you act out the song. Raise your hand if that's you. It's not going to surprise you who my artist is. I become Garth Brooks. Just like the badge, I don't think I take it too far (puts on cowboy hat). When a Garth song comes on, I am Garth Brooks. I can't tell you how many times I'm driving down the road by myself, singing, "Looking back on the memories, the dance we shared beneath the stars."

How many of you become Garth Brooks. Yes! I know all the songs and I sing them and I'm on stage, but most of us, when we come to the church, we're with the audience. Every time you serve, you're Garth. You are the man. You're on the stage. If you're in the back at 7:30 making coffee, if you're getting stuff ready at the Chapel, if you're in the dark, back room, running the sound for livestream, you're actually on stage as the man. That is Garth. You're in the car, doing 200 miles per hour around the track. You've got the badge; you're protecting. This is you and this is our passion for the church. This is why I get fired up about the local church. It's not about certain ministries; it's about every ministry. It's about everything that happens. We're all not just participants; we're ministers. And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that I come to you, thanking you for this church as we've taken the Lord's Supper together as a family, recognizing the death of our Savior. I do pray with Jesus as the head, our Savior that we would submit to his leadership in everything. I pray that we would feed and care for the body and love the body as Jesus loves the body. May we all participate. May all of us be on a journey, moving towards commitment to Jesus and to the members of his body.

I pray for the one right now that is brand new to our church. They have just joined the crowd and they're wondering, "What have I gotten myself into?" I pray that today they leave in peace.

I pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that their next step today is accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

I pray for those who have been saved and baptized and have been in the church for a while, but there is no participation, no getting in the car and on the track, no getting on stage in whatever ministry. I pray that their next step is to find out where they are going to be a minister in an ever so important ministry. For that, we are grateful. May the Holy Spirit call many by name today as they take their next step. It is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.