



Following Jesus

Part 7 – Leads to Unity and Maturity in the Church

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are talking today about unity and maturity in the church. We are at part seven in this series *Following Jesus*. Today, we are talking about an issue that is so important for the future of our church, but I just want to give you two big ideas that we need to think through as we talk about unity and maturity. A lot of times, we talk about church growth, especially as a church is growing, but really we need to focus not so much on church growth as we do on church health. I do believe healthy churches grow. If we will focus on health, growth takes place and takes care of itself. I believe when you see this in Acts 2 and you see the first century church is going after it and they are following the purposes of the church that Jesus laid out for us in Matthew 22 and Matthew 28, the scripture says that ***the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.***

So, we don't focus so much on growth at Woodland Hills Family Church, but we focus on health. When the elders get together, when the staff gets together, we rarely have meetings where we talk about how we can get more people. We rarely have those conversations, if ever. I can't think of too many times we've had those conversations. But, we are constantly thinking about health. Healthy churches grow.

So, to begin with, I want to talk about what church health is not. This is important as we measure the health of Woodland Hills.

Church health is not measured by the size of the church. I went back this week and looked over the last few years and just counted up how many churches I've had the opportunities to visit in the past few years. I came up with the number 87. I've visited 87 churches over the last few years. I've been in healthy churches and I have visited unhealthy churches. What's interesting is you really can tell almost the moment you walk in the door. You walk in and I can't explain it, but every now and then I just get this feeling something is going on there.

You can start to figure out healthy and unhealthy, but here's what I'm telling you: I've been in some healthy churches that run 200, 300, 400 people in small communities in Iowa, in rural communities in Minnesota. I've also been in healthy churches that run thousands and thousands of people. Here is what I know. Healthy is not a measure of whether you have 200 or 20,000. We've got to get beyond that. You can't just look at a large church and assume that because they are large, they must be healthy. Or they are small, so they must be unhealthy.

If they are in a community... How many of you have been driving through Arkansas lately or even as you go east and west through Missouri and you come across population sizes that say 189? There are 189 people that live in this town. You could say a church of 60 or 70 people could be a very healthy church if they can't reach anymore. If you win your entire town for Jesus, that's pretty good. So, it's not a measure of size and we've got to move beyond size as a measure of healthy.

Church health is not measured by the programs of our church. This is important because churches get caught up in this. I consider it the "program trap." Some of us want to view church health by the programs of the church. I have to be honest with you. I've been to a lot of churches where their programs are very thick on Sunday morning. There is so much going on. Sometimes you can look at that and think... I've been to churches where I see all they have going on and my very first thought is *I'm lazy. Woodland Hills is a lazy church; we're not doing anything.* But, I want you to know, here at Woodland Hills, we guard against adding a bunch a programs. We love deleting programs because it's the same thing we teach you about your family. It's the same thing we desire for your family. If you have a schedule that has you going 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, that doesn't mean you're healthy. I would even argue that means you are unhealthy. You have to find some ways to get margin in there and as a church, we desire margin.

Let me just give you a couple of examples. These are great programs, but we just don't do them. Some will come in and go "I wish they had Awana." We've made the decision to put all of our energy on Sunday morning. Awana is a great program. I have many friends that serve in that program and other churches in this town have that program. We think it's a great program. But don't look at the absence of Awana from our church as though we are not serious about children's ministry. We are very serious about children's ministry; we just don't add every program as it comes down the pipeline.

Church health is not measured by the history of our church. We don't measure our healthy by something that happened 30 years ago. A lot of churches are resting on what happened 30, 40, 50 years ago. I visited a church last year and it was actually two different churches meeting in the same facility. The church that was renting the facility at another service time was growing to 90 - 100 people being just a few months old. The church that meets before them, who owns the building, averages about eight to ten people on Sunday morning. The pastor of the other church says, "It's kind of eerie when you walk in. People are still sitting where they sat 40 years ago."

Could you imagine walking into this size room, 780 seats, and there being eight people in here and there all scattered throughout the seats? That makes it hard to build momentum. Branson entertainers will back me up on that one. That's a tough crowd. To see a church with this massive facility that was built to seat a lot of people down to eight people, that's a church resting on its history and not a church that's getting serious and focused about reaching not just the next generation, but every generation. So, at Woodland Hills, we don't rest on what we did ten years ago. It's about today.

Church health is not measured by the success of other churches. Here's where we really get into a trap. This is a touch one. I drive a minivan that just turned 188,000 miles last night. I'm very proud of this van. It's falling apart. The air conditioning doesn't work and I have a window that when you roll it down, you're not sure if it will ever come back up. You know what I'm talking about. Everything is

starting to fall apart. I don't have time in my life to live with my van in the shop. I tell the guys at the shop, "I can't be here every day; I want to watch my children grow up, so I need to actually take the van."

I was with a friend the other day who had a minivan a year older than mine. I got in the van in his passenger seat. It had about 20,000 miles more than my van. His dashboard looked like a movie prop because all of the dials were just bouncing back and forth. I videoed it because it was so entertaining to watch this thing.

He goes, "What do you think?"

I go, "You're making me feel so much better about my van."

Isn't that true? You think you don't have anything great and then you're with somebody who has something worse than you and you're like "Wow!" We have to be careful, I have to be careful that I don't go into other places and look at what they have going on versus what Woodland Hills has going on and be like "Well you don't have it going on like I have..."

I have friends and I'm constantly challenging them. They are at a great church, a successful church in a big city and it's like they never learn from other churches; they're always wanting to teach other churches.

I said, "You can't walk into a room all the time beating your chest like you're Tarzan. You need to go in and be a learner. Find out what other churches are doing. Just because you're in a big city with a big budget and a big building and great numbers... There's a lot that you can learn from other churches. Don't go into a room beating your chest and instructing everybody else on how to do it. Sit there with your mouth closed and learn."

We were just at a conference, Stephanie Watson, Denise Bevins, and myself. It was a family ministry conference. We met with some different churches for meals and stuff. I've got to be honest with you, there were a couple of them where we walked out and our first thought was *Aren't we glad we don't have that going on at our church?* The biggest issue in most family conferences that we go to is the staff is there without their senior pastor and they're just frustrated. Their like, "We want to do this, but we don't have leadership in our church that will allow us to do this. They won't get behind us."

I looked at Stephanie and Denise and I went, "Will you say thank you? Just say thank you."

But we walk out and have to guard our hearts because the health of Woodland Hills Family Church is not guided by other churches.

So we are going to see today... If you have your Bibles, turn to Ephesians 4. We're going to be talking about how we do measure church health. Obviously, it's in the title of this message, so I'm giving the recipe away already. **Church health is measured by unity and maturity.** This is what we need to look

at: Not the size, not other churches, not our programs, it's about what God is doing in this church and at this time.

We live in a time that is interesting. As we talk about diversity, racial reconciliation, and, as you've been reading in the news lately, even within the evangelical circles, this election is dividing us. It's interesting to watch and I'm getting into a lot of debates and I'm being dragged into debates I don't want to go into because I just think some of them are getting pretty ridiculous. I'm watching friends in ministry kind of separate. I have pastor friends that refuse to talk about it at all from the pulpit. You've probably figured out that I'm not one of them. They just want to get through this and keep their churches intact.

I love this quote from Max Lucado. I think it's so important for us to understand. Going back 2,000 years to how the church got started, it's important for us to understand what the church looked like 2,000 years ago, compared to what it looks like today. He gives a great little snapshot of the Book of Acts. Here's what his definition is.

"The first generation of Christians was a tinderbox of contrasting cultures and backgrounds. At least 15 different nationalities heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost."

The Day of Pentecost is when the church got started. Think about that. There were so many different cultures represented. Not only cultures, it says...

"Jews stood next to Gentiles. Men worshiped with women. Slaves and masters alike sought after Christ. Can people of such varied backgrounds and cultures (and political parties) get along with each other?"

The answer is yes. But, it doesn't work when your greatest tie is a denomination. It doesn't work when your greatest tie is a political candidate. It only works when at the center of it all is Jesus Christ. That's the only way it works. That's the only way we find unity and maturity as a church. There is no other way. There is no other name by which man can be saved. There is no other name at which every knee one day will bow before and proclaim King of kings, Lord of lords. That's the only way that it works.

So, we are going to jump in and look at the church. We're going to walk through this passage, a verse at a time, and see what the measure of a healthy church is and how we get to unity and maturity.

Here's where we start in Ephesians 4. ***11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...*** Let me walk through each one of those quickly.

The apostles, in its strictest form, were the ones who saw the resurrected Jesus. They performed miracles. Today, some look at this spiritual gift or they look at this office as those who are good at cross-cultural ministry, pioneer evangelism.

The prophets are the ones who talked about the future. These are the ones who gave the direct revelation of God prior to the writing of the New Testament.

You have the evangelists. These are the ones that bring people into the church. These are the ones that proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and grace for all. These are the ones that go out. You saw an evangelist last week; his name is Joe White. That's an evangelist.

The reason I love having Joe speak regularly here is because I'm not an evangelist. I don't have that gift. When I'm with Joe in public and he starts evangelizing someone, I'm usually hiding behind a pole or a wall, watching how it goes down. I've watched Joe evangelize Fox News contributors. I've watched him go after athletes. God has given him a special ability to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

I do have to add this in because some of you are like, "Good, I hide behind walls too; I don't have to share my faith." That's not true. There is a difference between spiritual gift or office of an evangelist and Christian service. You and I are all part of the "go and make disciples." I still have to share my faith. I just want you to know that as your pastor, sharing my faith with a stranger on the street takes a certain amount of... I have to work out and stretch prior to doing it. It takes something for me to do it. It doesn't flow out of me like it flows out of the office of an evangelist or the one with the spiritual gift. It's kind of the same idea with giving. I have the spiritual gift of giving. Some of you are relieved because you don't. That doesn't mean that you don't give if you don't have that gift.

We have the pastors. These are the ones who shepherd the flock. I think it's interesting and I don't think it's a mistake that pastor comes behind evangelist. They are the ones that shepherd the flock. They are the ones that do what the shepherd does for the sheep. They feed, they care for, they nurture, they protect from enemies. I feel like this is my role as pastor at Woodland Hills Family Church. I feed and care for and mourn with you and rejoice with you. When I sense enemies coming or the elders sense enemies coming in, that's when you have to protect and guard from that as well.

And then the teachers. These are the ones who teach the word of God and how to rightly apply it. Christ gave this to the church. In other words, Jesus calls leaders to equip his church for ministry. Jesus calls administrators to build up ministers. It's very important for you to understand this key and core value of Woodland Hills Family Church. You are not looking at the minister of Woodland Hills Family Church. My name is not on the sign outside. You've been by the churches that change pastors every two to three years. That name of the pastor has been painted over about 40 times. We don't have Minister Ted Cunningham because you are the minister.

So we have leaders ***12 ...to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...*** So, the leaders, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers were given to the church for the purpose of equipping everyone in the church, every follower of Jesus, for works of service. Here's what we teach at Woodland Hills. Every member is a minister. We believe you are part of this family. You are a minister of the gospel of Jesus. When we gather, when we spend time in home groups, when you come to a Bible study, I want you to really get in your mind the vision, the goal of that. The strategy behind that is that you would go out and do something with it. Not call back to the church and have something done. You are the church. Be the church whether you're at home, in your neighborhood, at work, on a trip, in the community; you are a minister.

We believe everybody in here, if you are a follower of Jesus, has been given a spiritual gift. We believe you have more than one gift. We believe you have a gift mix. We want you to discover what that is. We believe you are a ten at something and the only way you get to unity in the body of Christ is understanding that our diversity, our differences should unite us. That is not a message you will get on the 24-hour news network today. Our differences are dividing us. If you don't agree with that person, unfriend them on Facebook. If you don't agree with how that person has a take on this election, just be angry with them and be bitter and frustrated. Listen, you and I are called from the person of Jesus... He's at the head. We are all different.

I have to share this. Bob, would you stand up for just a second. I want you to wave, Bob. I have to do this. This is one of my favorite members of Woodland Hills. Not because he's old, but every time I walk down that aisle on Sunday, he'll go "How's the material today?" I love that. He calls the sermon material. I tell him I think it's probably a six or seven. I don't know if I'm allowed to share this, but here we go. Bob went to the security team meeting a couple of weeks ago because he wants to be security. We don't have an age limit on security, so I love that. If something breaks out here, he's going to be like Barney Fife looking for his bullet. By that time, I'm gone. It's too late.

Bob told me something a couple of weeks ago that fits with this point perfectly. He said... And this may be training you're not supposed to know about. We can restructure it if this is too much information. He goes, "I was really struck by the fact the whole training was to help us at Woodland Hills Family Church, if we're going to be on the security team, identify odd people. Do you know how difficult that's going to be at Woodland Hills?"

That's good, Bob. That is going to be a challenge because this is a group of very odd people, of strange people. Let me tell you something. Unity doesn't just happen. Unity is a decision. It's you are weird, you are odd, you wear me out, you drive her crazy, he's tired of you, and says, but I will choose to love you. I will choose to see how my part works with your part. That's the only way it works. You are a minister of the gospel of Jesus, as odd as you are, as strange as you are, we believe, according to Ephesians, you have been **created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he prepared in advance for you to do...** You are a minister. "So, how long do I have to work at this ministry thing? Thanks for asking.

13 ...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. To continue to work towards unity and maturity and here's the bottom line of this and I hope you see all of this.

We grow in unity and maturity with Jesus at the center of it all.

If you find yourself pulling away from a believer at Woodland Hills Family Church, I just have to tell you it's at that moment that Jesus is not at the center of it all. You understand that we love some pretty difficult, dangerous, democratic people around this church. I just added that because it was a D. I wanted to alliterate the list. But we love some difficult people around her. Who is your source for loving a difficult person? It's Jesus. Who gives you the ability to love a dangerous person? It's Jesus. Who gives you the ability to love a democrat? It's Jesus.

Jesus is at the center of it all for he is the head of the church and we are his body and we work and serve one another and are equipped for these acts of service and these works of service until the body of Christ is built up.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. I love this. If we're are growing in unity and maturity, things shouldn't get to us like this election is getting to us. It really shouldn't. If we are growing in unity and maturity, if we are fully understanding who Jesus is and Jesus is at the center of it all, we shouldn't be like children. This emphasis here is that as the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers are given to the church to equip the church to be the church, that means we move from being babes in Christ. We're not affected by things, we're not challenged by things the way we were when we were children, tossed back and forth. We should be able to handle it because Jesus is at the center of it all, not a politician, not even the United States of America; it's Jesus. He's at the center of it all and he's got this and we know that.

I'm like, *Are we just going to get through this political season?* And then this week, I spent a lot of time praying, a lot of time thinking, a lot of time studying, going okay, here's the rest of the year. We have to plan out a rest of the year sermon. We haven't done any political talks. We have had illustrations, but not full sermons. So, on November 6, two days before the election, we are going to have one stand-alone sermon called NOTA, which stands for None of the Above, which is where a lot of you are at right now. You look at who your choices are and you're going, "None of the above. I don't want any of them."

Let's just talk about it. This is that risk... I won't be visiting as many churches next year after this message, but... There are some of you in here right now that believe we owe Richard Nixon an apology. I've talked to you. The biggest mistake he made was he didn't use a hammer, right? That's like the biggest mistake he made. And we're looking at it going "This is just absolutely crazy." Talking to seasoned believers, I see this election being tossed to and fro, being blown back and forth. Here's what we say to young people who start dating. You shouldn't decide what you believe about dating and sexual purity on a date. That's the worst place to figure out what you believe about dating and sexual purity. You should have that figured out long before you go on that date.

I love Pastor David Jeremiah. He says, "Don't decide what you believe about morality in the back seat of a car." That's for my older group; that's a dated illustration. I believe the same thing is true of elections. You shouldn't decide what you believe during an election. A debate shouldn't sway your beliefs on government, on Israel, on war, on immigration, on racial reconciliation. What happens in the next few weeks shouldn't determine all that. That should be conviction inside of you. That should be the decision made.

After NOTA, we're going to spend the last three weeks in November in a series called *Heal Our Land* to try to bring some healing back, first and foremost, to the congregation of Woodland Hills Family Church because some of you need it. Some of you are wearing me out. With some of you, I'm just thinking you shouldn't be this tossed back and forth. This shouldn't be getting to you. Let me just ask you this and this is why we teach. Maybe this election is simply revealing your need to draw closer to Christ in

maturity and his church in unity. Maybe that's all it's doing. Hopefully, maybe with that message, we can all calm down just a little bit.

Unity and maturity both require hard conversations. We have to say the tough stuff. Let's keep going with the scripture to make this point. How do you have these conversations? The Apostle Paul gives us the recipe.

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love... That's the key. The truth without love is arrogant, it's bullying, it's nasty. That's where a lot of us are at right now. We're just speaking the truth. I have a friend that calls himself a truth teller. I introduced him to another friend and we were having breakfast. This friend was sharing what's going on at his church. This friend is at one of these churches that is doing very well and is very healthy and the other friend just starts critiquing... They met like 15 minutes ago.

He goes, "I'm just speaking the truth."

I'm like, "Yeah, but how do you neglect all that truth in the Proverbs that says even a fool is considered wise if he retains his words. I don't think you need to say everything that comes to your mind." And I can't believe I'm saying that because I often say everything that comes to my mind. "You just met him 15 minutes ago; who gave you the right to tell him..."

We speak the truth in love. ***...we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.***

Rules without relationship leads to rebellion.

Josh McDowell taught us this principle when it comes to family, when it comes to parenting. Maybe you grew up in a church where you didn't really get the relationship piece, but you got the rules piece and you can just see the carnage of those decisions. You're seeing the carnage of numbers and large volumes of people who do not follow Jesus because they missed the relationship piece and they grew up in a church that just gave them the rules piece. Rules without relationship leads to rebellion. Truth without love leads to rebellion, leads to anger, leads to disunity, leads to discord.

I like what one guy said. He put it this way. *Speaking the truth without love is like kissing someone with bad breath.*

I've been in those situations. I'm asking the Holy Spirit to call me on this one. It's hard to get love out in a Tweet. You can get the truth out in a Tweet, but it's hard to get love out in a Tweet. Stay off of Twitter during the debates. My alma mater has been uninviting people because of the anger. I mean to speak at convocation because of the anger they've been spewing on Twitter. Think about that. They're like "Hey, if we're going to invite 10,000 students at Liberty University, we would really like to speak the truth with love, not just the truth where you are angry."

Unity and maturity are measured by serving one another.

This is according to the scripture. That's what Jesus said. ***"You'll be known as my disciples by the way you love one another."*** You won't be known as my disciples by the way you are able to underline verses in the Bible and put tabs on them. You'll be known by what you do with what you know. You'll be known by the love that comes out of you. Paul said the same thing to the church at Corinth. ***Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*** So with hard conversations, we speak the truth with love.

It was interesting that within an hour of writing that part in the message last week, speak the truth in love, and just thinking it through, I looked at my phone. It was 11:00 am and I was getting a phone call from R.G. Yallaly, one of our elders. R.G. and Karen are over Marriage 911. I was shocked because it was 11:00 am. That's because R.G. has a steadfast rule as an elder at Woodland Hills Family Church. He does no ministry before noon. He retired down to Branson and he just wants coffee on the porch... So, I answered the phone, "R.G., it's 11:00; what are you doing calling?"

He begins to tell me a story about someone he's working with. Now before you say I'm talking about you, I'm not talking about you because R.G. talks to a lot of people who are as stubborn as you. He is the one who gets husbands and wives into Marriage 911. If you are a Marriage 911 counselor around here and mentor, we thank you. We are grateful for you because all you do is have hard conversations with people. R.G. and Karen are counselors as well. They work through issues with husbands and wives, but they are also the administrators of it, so they are getting couples to the help that they need. He said, "I have one I want to talk through with you; it's a tough one."

We talked for 30 minutes about the conversation that needs to be had with this one individual. It's going to be a hard conversation, a very difficult conversation. We were strategizing and we were thinking through the words to say. Do you know why? If you've not met R.G. Yallaly, you need to know he's our elder that we call Precious. He's precious. That's the only work I can come up for him. I've actually kidded Travis that he could become a little more precious. He's that guy that gets it. And R.G. is making sure... He knows what needs to be said, but he wants to make sure he speaks the truth in love.

Now here's the hard part with unity and maturity. Some of you will think *They're just coming after me.* We didn't strategize for 30 minutes because we had nothing better to do. We didn't strategize for 30 minutes on how to have that conversation because we want to take you out. We strategized for 30 minutes on how to have that conversation because we want to speak the truth in love because your life is falling apart. We see the reckless decisions that you're making and the insanity in which you are choosing to live and saying, "There is a way out of this. We can help you with this. It's not just destroying your family; it's destroying your friendships. It's wrecking your life."

The more we talked, the more worked up I was getting, but the whole point is speaking the truth with love. We don't want to be that church that walks into difficult conversations and the purpose is just to tear you down and get you gone. That sneaks in every now and then and we have to be called by the Holy Spirit on that one. Our job is to speak the hard conversations, but the goal is to be unified at the end, the goal is to be reconciled at the end, the goal is to be brought together at the end. These hard conversations maintain unity and grow us in maturity.

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together... Now we are going to get this body metaphor. **...by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up** (so, maturity and unity takes place) **in love...** That's key here. I thought about it this week. Of the churches I've been able to visit and just take notice of, this is the key. If they're struggling, why is the love missing from this church? Where did it go? What's happening? Why are we not being brought back to that? And then watch this: **...as each part does its work.**

Some of you are in a relationship right now and you're worn out because you feel you're doing your part, but your spouse is not. You feel you're doing your part to bring reconciliation back to the father/daughter relationship or the mother/son relationship. You're doing your part, but you're not being met... And you're using all sorts of word pictures. You're not being met halfway or you're giving your 50%, but they're not giving their 50% or you're giving your 100%, but they're not giving their 100%. It takes each part. This is the key I want you to walk away with today. The unity and maturity of Woodland Hills Family Church depends on your part. It depends on what you are doing to serve, what you are doing to be equipped for acts of service and going out and actually living that out in the community.

We have fought it for years. We have no desire to become a Bible study church. We have no desire to become just a worship church. You know our desire here is to fulfill and live out and to balance the five purposes of the church: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, and Evangelism. We don't want Bible students. We don't want just people who come and learn the word of God and do nothing with it.

Here's what we're after in unity and maturity. James 2 says. **15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?** I'll personalize that for me. What good am I if I know what needs to happen to help this person and I choose to do nothing about it?

You might say, "Well, we probably need to get them into a class to help them get better at this. We need to equip them to step up on their own and do something about it." No, let me tell you that we need to jump in and put our faith into practice right there and on the spot.

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. Knowing what Jesus said and doing nothing with it is dead. Knowing how Jesus lived and doing nothing with it and not practicing it this week is dead. We've learned and have chosen to do nothing with it.

We have three points of application as we close. I think we are going to guide these towards our home groups this week. There are home groups in here that are healthy and there are some home groups in here that are struggling with health. You're a smaller picture of the bigger church. Two weeks ago... I'm probably sharing too much, but I feel like it's family story time this morning.

Denise was pretty exhausted and I could just feel it. We were kind of laughing all week. I said something to her and I kind of felt her tone back to me was "Do it yourself." Do you know what it was? I listen to almost all of her phone calls because our walls are paper thin. I hear all of her phone calls.

She was working with home group leaders and she was working with benevolence, she was ministry, ministry, ministry, and I'm just thinking how she's giving, giving, giving, giving, and she's talking to home group leaders who are giving, giving, giving, giving, and being met with nothing in return. So, just ask yourself where your home group falls into these final three. There are those in here, as part of the bigger church family in works and service and unity and maturity that **you take, but don't give**. You're here to get something. And we struggle with this. When we have opportunities to do benevolence, there are those who show up just for that. I want you to know that our goal is not to just meet needs. Our goal is to bring you into the family of God. Our goal is that you would become part of this family and grow in unity and maturity.

You're like "Well I'm not at a place... I have needs right now." I have pastor friends in here right now that have come to Branson just to recuperate. You got burned out at a church or you got fired from a church. We had this happening here at Woodland Hills. You're here right now and you'll tell me when you meet me. You'll say, "I'm not at a place right now where I can do a whole bunch."

And my first response to that is "No problem. Why don't you come in and sit? Why don't you get healthy again? Why don't you get restored?" I'm able to have that conversation with him because I know he knows this is for a season. This isn't for the next 10 or 20 years. "I know I need to get my wounds wrapped up a little bit and get healed up," but then he needs to go back out there. But, for some of you, for your entire life, the church has been a place where you take, but don't give. The reason we challenge you today is because you are working against unity and maturity.

There are some of you in here that are burning out because you're the opposite of this. **You give, but don't receive**. Part of pastoring, part of watching how a home group is working or even how a ministry program is working is we are trying to watch and see what's happening. If we find a leader that is in this boat, that all they are doing is giving and giving to the home group... Here's what happens. You've got 12 people in a home group and they are all taking and one is giving or maybe two are giving and the rest are taking, eventually, people stop showing up. We have to be on that as church leaders to see that they are burning out.

This is what staff meeting is all about at Woodland Hills. We gather around and we call people by name and go "If that continues, in six months, they'll be gone." We have enough ministry experience around here to know that's what happens to the person who just gives and never received. We are called as a church family... Paul says this. We mourn with those who mourn and we rejoice with those who rejoice, meaning the church is a place for you to serve and be served. The church is a place for you to love and be loved. The church is for you to celebrate with others as they celebrate with you.

What we are going after is this right here. **You give and receive**. This is you doing your part. This is you discovering what your acts of service, what your works of service are and saying, "I will jump in and do it. I want to be a part of the family. I want to add to the unity and maturity at Woodland Hills Family Church. I don't want to be someone who distracts. I don't want to be someone who brings discord to the church. I want us to be a family that's growing together with Jesus at the center of it all, with Jesus as the head and we are the body."

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we come to you. I ask that the Holy Spirit calls folks by name who have been attending for years, but not serving, who have been coming for years and they enjoy what's going on, on a weekend, but they've never really found a place or have even had the desire to fit into the body here at Woodland Hills. I'm asking right now that the Holy Spirit calls them by name. I pray that they're convicted today and that that conviction would turn to action and they would say, "Okay, I want to be equipped. I want to learn. I want to grow. I want to find out how to serve."

I pray for our home groups right now. I pray for the one who is taking, but not giving that they would understand their role and their part in that and that they would be convicted of that. I pray for our leaders right now. So many leaders of this church give so much. I know Satan is out to pick off leaders and stress and burn out and emptying ourselves without being filled back up is a key strategy. I pray today for every leader at Woodland Hills Family Church. With Jesus as the source of their life, I pray that they would continue to give, but they would receive as well.

I pray that our whole church would come together and we would live in unity, we would grow up, we wouldn't be a church where an election, a political cycle would get us tossed to and fro. We know who our leader is. Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, we trust in the name of the Lord our God.

We're grateful for what you are doing in this church. Continue to use our leaders as they equip our ministers as they go out today. We look forward to seeing what you are going to do in our community and ultimately around the world with what's happening here this morning and this week.

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