



NOTA

(None of the Above)

Pastor Ted Cunningham

There is one thing that I know we can agree on and that is the gratefulness that we have when we walk in on Tuesday because of the men and women that have sacrificed so that we get to do what we're doing on Tuesday. We do it a few times a year around here, but I'm going to ask all of our veterans to stand so we can say thank you for the opportunity you have given us to vote and to keep our country free.

Years ago, I was coming off a plane in San Antonio. I was with a soldier. I did the typical, simple thank you for serving and was going to walk on, but we struck up a conversation and we were talking and getting along. He was on a tour of duty, gone for nine months. I was talking with him and I don't know why it didn't even dawn on me what I was about to experience as I walked outside of security. I was just talking to him like nothing is happening, not thinking about the wife and the kids that would be standing there with balloons and posters. Does anybody know what I'm talking about?

I'm talking with him and he so rudely interrupted our conversation to run out to his family. Like all of you would have done, I lost it. I wasn't prepared for it. It was like a moment of shock as he hugged his family. I had a brief moment where I'm like, *Would it be inappropriate for me join the hug?* That's what I thought. I was just going to find my way up to them and gather around the family. I didn't, but I say thank you and on Friday... I think Friday, Veteran's Day, is such a great day in Branson. It's a great day in our nation. It's going to be a day we need after Tuesday. And all God's people said... Amen.

Okay... Where's the offering basket? One more story before we jump in. We're talking today about NOTA. If you're brand new to our church, this means "None of the Above." This is just our message on the election. We didn't do a series, but I want to say thank you to my friend, Rob Ketterling, who has done an entire series on NOTA in Minnesota. I told him, "You are brave." He texted me this week, "Have fun with it." We never really have to worry about that at Woodland Hills.

I just want to recognize who is in the room. There are some of you who feel as though we have talked too much about the election and there are others in the room who feel we haven't said anything about the election and then we have everybody in between. In fact, people say, "I brought friends and family one Sunday when you were making jokes and that was not appropriate and I was frustrated." I'm here to tell you that this is going to be a rough morning for you. I'm grateful that you're here, but if you are brand new to our church, this is a good morning because I want you to leave encouraged and full of hope. That's the goal.

No matter what happens on Tuesday, some of you are just frustrated and irritated and exhausted. Some of you have already voted. Some of you are not only supporting a candidate, you're gushing over a candidate. Some of you are excited. You're wanting this particular individual to get elected and you can't wait and you're hoping the poles are wrong and you're just going after it.

But, I think there are a lot of us in here, including myself, that think this is what election day is going to feel like. We are going to talk about what we know here in a moment, but I want to first talk about what we are feeling. This is what a lot of us will feel on Tuesday:

[Video plays] www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkJR2LEihQY So feel free to beat your head against the voting booth on Tuesday.

Joe White, who spoke here a few weeks ago, started Men at the Cross a few years ago. He would have guys come in and speak and encourage guys on men's discipleship. He had speakers from all over, from all denominations and all walks of life. He gave all of us a speaking agreement that we had to sign if we were going to be a part of Men at the Cross. He had one word picture in there that has just always stuck with me. He would say, "Listen, I want all of us to keep the ball in the middle of the fairway." That's because you can come in with your denominational preferences, your ideas, and the things you hold dear. But, what we're talking about and obviously, with Joe building a cross at this event, we were keeping it centered on Jesus. So, we are going to take the ball right up the middle.

My problem is, if you've ever golfed with me, you know that doesn't ever happen. I've never hit the ball straight up the middle and it's not an accident that I always go right. I'm just saying that I have a slice and I'm here to admit that to you today. I that hope at the end of the day, some of you who are long-time this or long-time that will just have your heart opened to what the Lord has to speak to you today. One of the deep convictions that I have is that I would never be one of those pastors that speaks and then you walk away saying, "I have no idea what he said. He was so trying to play all the different fields that I have no idea where he stands or what his convictions are."

Today, we are going to jump right into what we believe as a church, to what we hold true. As we do, I just want to be very clear. I've had three weeks to prepare for this message. I don't typically give a bibliography with my messages, but I have read everything that has come across my desk. You have sent me a lot. So, it's pastors from Church Swindoll to John McArthur, Tommy Nelson, Andy Stanley. There are pastors from San Diego and New York and even pastors from outside our country who are exhausted with our elections. I've watched sermon after sermon and I've dived into this.

I got to a place last week where I was pretty comfortable. Typically, we don't exhaust topics, but I almost feel like we exhausted this one a little bit because I wasn't hearing or reading anything new. And I don't know if you have this tendency... going back to the golf shot illustration. Pastors have a tendency to get into the weeds. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? Have you ever experienced that in a sermon? Have you ever listened to a sermon where we got out of the fairway and into the weeds? I'll answer that for you if you go here. Yes, you have. You have heard that often. My goal today is to stay out of the weeds. I heard some passionate pastors who I agree with on the essentials that spend a lot of time in sermons in the weeds. I said, "Lord, let me say out of the weeds."

I hope when we leave here today, you have an entire list of reasons why you vote, but I hope you keep the core of what we're talking about today, which is what we label as the essentials. At our church, we have two types of beliefs. We have essential beliefs and non-essential beliefs. The essential beliefs, we hold true and we do not change. The elders do not gather to figure out if we still hold these essential beliefs true. We do. These are from Christian orthodoxy, all the way back to the Nicene Creed. We hold these truths.

But, there are a lot of non-essentials that not all of us agree on. From the scripture, we interpret things differently. We've talked about it here. Wine, that would be in the non-essential category. We don't put that in the essential category. If you abstain, great. If you drink wine with moderation to bring glory to God, great. We're not going to divide a church over a non-essential like that.

We believe the Lord is returning; that is an essential belief. When he returns... We don't put a time table on that. Let me tell you something. For my whole life, I have believed in a pre-tribulational rapture. This election has caused me to doubt that just a little bit. Good, you got that joke. This is a smart group. Pre-tribulational means the Lord returns before the tribulation, just so we get that straight. I just want to make sure everybody knows that. And with the election, it feels like the tribulations. Anyway, we're going to do a whole other message on that some other time.

I can have a friend who we disagree on the non-essentials, but on the essentials, we hold true to those. Just so there are no questions and you don't leave here wondering what we believe, we are going to start with these essentials, and I'm only giving you four of them today. As I walk in on Tuesday, these are the four that I'm holding and this is why I'm voting for who I'm voting for.

1. We believe life begins in the womb. (Isaiah 44:24, Isaiah 64:8, Psalm 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:5, Luke 1:41, 44)

We do not have time to get into all of the passages today, but I've placed them there for home groups. I'm hoping that home groups will go through these this week. Even after the election, you may need to take some time to really dig into these. In my studies, I went to one I know. I haven't found an evangelical leader that goes against this. For Dr. James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, this is a single-issue election. It's not about economy for him. It's not about the second amendment. All of that for him is over here in the non-essentials. This is the single issue. He's very clear and I'm not telling you anything you can't find online. Dr. Dobson is voting for Donald Trump and Governor Pence because of this issue and it's because the Supreme Court is at stake. He places his endorsement there off of this single issue. Believers, we hold that life begins in the womb. To me, it's not even an issue of partial birth or late term abortion; it's just the issue of abortion. We believe life begins in the womb.

2. We believe marriage is between a man and a woman for a lifetime. (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-6, Ephesians 5:22-33, Romans 1:26-27)

This is another issue that is at stake. The president will get to bring justices to the supreme court. The big one I studied this week... If you have seen the controversy of Jen Hatmaker and all of her books being pulled from Lifeway and all the different book stores because she came out against this... I don't know

many evangelical leaders coming out against this. Here's what I do know. We have a tone problem in the church today. We don't have a belief problem; we have a tone problem. I can stand up here, with love in my heart, and tell you that if you are a gay or lesbian in this place today, we believe Jesus is for everyone. We are glad you're here. We're thrilled that you're here.

Don't hear for a second that because I believe that biblical, New Testament marriage... Genesis 2: 24 says, ***That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*** I can say that as Jesus repeated it in Matthew 12 and Paul repeats it in Ephesians 5. I can say that and at the very same time, say to any gay or lesbian in here... To anyone from the LGBT community, we are so thrilled that you are here today. We are glad that you are here today. I think the fact that I can hold to this is part of the struggle that we have. I think people in evangelical Christianity that are departing from this are departing for the purpose of tone. They don't like the anger that comes out, but I'm holding to this and I'm hoping that our supreme court will reverse the ridiculous decisions that have been made over the last several decades on point 1 and point 2.

3. We believe all men and women are created in the image of God and have intrinsic value. (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 8:3-8, James 3:9)

This, to me, is super important because your lifestyle doesn't determine your value. We believe here that all of us are created in the image of God and this gives us automatic value. You have value no matter what your sin problem. What I've learned and have always held to... Again, we put the passage here for you to study on your own. ***...as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men...***

Sin did not take away the created image of God in man. Sin marred the image of God in man, but it did not take away the image of God. The image of God is on every human being and this is inside the womb and outside of the womb. This is no matter what your skin color or your lifestyle, you're created in the image of God. Point 3 and Point 2 are hard for many to reconcile today. "Ted, you are declaring the lifestyle that I'm living in as sin." Yes, I am, through the scripture. "You're also saying I was created in the image of God and I have value." Yes. And I'm also saying number 4.

4. We believe Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Timothy 2:5, Ephesians 2)

How do you walk into a voting booth with that? If you look at the candidates, you don't see them openly professing Jesus. It's very important. Jesus is the only way to the Father. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. He is the truth. You and I don't get to determine truth. I get to stand up here and share some things that every now and then I go into the weeds. I want to be better as a pastor at getting out of the weeds and back into the fairway, but Jesus is the truth. I'm not the source of truth. The elders of this church are not the source of truth. Jesus is the source of truth. We find truth in him.

And, he is the life. You're like, "Okay, so wait a second. Ted, I am gay. I believe gay marriage is okay and you say it is wrong and it an abomination before God." Yes, I do. "You also say that I'm created in the image of God and have value." Yes. Adding all that up, here's what I'm also saying. You must confess your sin before God. There is but one mediator between God and man and it is the person of

Jesus Christ. And he stands between God and you. It's through his shed blood that you have redemption.

I've been prepared for people to walk out and I don't want you to be shaken by it. There are some of you who have seen it already and some of you... I just want to encourage you. I've sat through a lot of talks where I didn't agree with 100% of what was being said. I just want to encourage you to consider doing the same. I think we can do that.

We believe Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life and here's the problem. I'm taking these in and I want you to know I've also studied the 2016 Democratic Party Platform, July 21, 2016 and the Republican Party Platform, 2016. I did not make one cover more awesome than the other. That was not me. This was a pdf file that was printed. But I think it was no accident. Can I encourage some of you who are democrats because Grandma and Grandpa were democrats? This, written a couple of months ago, is not what your grandma and grandpa stood for.

Can I just say to you... And I'm going to be very careful with what I say here because I've had a lot of words in my mouth and I prayed, "Lord, give me the filter." And I'm not feeling it right now. So, I'm going to take a moment before my Father in heaven and ask for the filter because I want to tell you this very clearly. And I can give you the page numbers if you want. Small groups, I want to encourage you to spend more time in your Bible than you do in these platforms. But with what we just shared that we said we believe, this Democratic Platform stands in direct opposition to that.

Last night, I saw a Tweet from Franklin Graham. This isn't about democrat or republican. I wish I could say that, but that's not true. If you want to look at the two, these are worldviews. These are two completely different ways of looking at the world. I've never said it this strong before in front of this church. Honestly, it's why I've been developing my comedy career to have something to fall back on when this goes bad. I just want to encourage you. When you go in... You're struggling right now, but don't look at these as just platforms. They are worldviews.

My friends in the Assemblies of God and my friends in the Southern Baptist Convention gather every year at a convention just like the political parties. For the sake of this morning, I'm sticking with just talking about the two political parties, but the Assemblies of God and the Southern Baptist and the other denominations gather every year like the political parties gather every four years. It's not just to nominate a candidate; it's to sit down and say, "What do we believe?" These platforms have come out of those meetings this summer. Many of it is just addendums and changes and edits, but these are two opposite worldviews. You can read this and stay out of the weeds. You don't have to get into the economic policies or the Second Amendment and all that, but you can find out clearly what they believe about marriage and family...

I think here is the issue and I think all of us can agree on this. Evangelical Christians are deeply divided over the character of the candidate, but we are united around the essential beliefs. I haven't met anyone... Christian leaders are all over the map when it comes to this candidate. I have friends that I've watched... I had the opportunity to gather with 50 Southern Baptists. They gathered in a room and asked me to be a part of it. I just sat in the corner. I didn't say anything. There were pastors of large

Baptist churches. When they talked about LGBT, it was kind of down here and when they talked about the marriage and family, it was down here. When they got into the elections, the energy in the room went way up. For an hour and a half, these pastors were going at each other and I'm just sitting there the whole time going, *Wow, this is exciting.*

I had the opportunity that night to do comedy for those 50 pastors and their spouses. I'm like, "Thank you, Lord Jesus. You couldn't bring me a better opportunity." I just did normal comedy and at the end I said to them, "I'm going to tell you this right now. Our nation..." I'm looking at statesmen of the Southern Baptist Convention. I said, "Listen, our nation... I have as much of a desire to see revival in our nation as you do. I want to see the Lord do something great in this nation. I have that passion, but I have to tell you guys something." This is after we were laughing for 30 minutes. I end with this, "It's never going to happen until you guys get as excited about marriage and family as you do about this election in November." And then I said, "And that is how you kill a comedy show." And I handed the microphone to the person and I walked off the stage as fast as I could.

It's because they were divided over the character of the candidate and I just want to pause for just a second. We can't start saying, follower of Jesus, that the character is not important. Character is very important. This is what we teach our kids, isn't it? I want my kids to understand character is important. And in leadership, we are doubly accountable. I've had some of you come at me saying, "We're not electing a pastor; we're electing a president!" I said, "But don't for a second diminish the role of character."

I have to be honest with you. Yes, we have candidates that are going at each other and they both claim to take high roads, or one does, and I'm thinking, *I'm watching the ads like everybody else in the United States; there's nobody taking any high roads.* I am praying for one to learn, shall he be elected, to bridle his tongue. I know that's wearing you out, but we have essentials. I just want to encourage some of you that are frustrated and exhausted. You're like, "I just want to be open minded." Let me just remind you of this. **Don't be so open minded that your brain falls out.** Learn, study, read.

You're like "Ted, we're a democracy." We are a democracy and that's a good thing. We get to vote and we get to decide. Yes, we do. But, I'm going to remind you of something Pastor Tommy Nelson said. If you don't know Tommy Nelson, he's kind of the middle ground between C.S. Lewis and John Wayne. If you were to put those two people together, that's Pastor Tommy Nelson and here's what he said. *"51% can be just as terrible a tyrant when they are misinformed and immoral."* And this is what we are dealing with today.

I'll remind you when it comes to the character of an individual, when it comes to the division that we have around a person, we need to go back to the beliefs and here's why. **Our children are watching and listening.** We believe at Woodland Hills Family Church that our children see everything we do, hear everything we say, forget nothing, and then they repeat. What are they seeing in you right now? What are they seeing in me?

I'll just give you a personal story I've asked the Lord to work on in me, unrelated to the election. I understand the need, even at 42 years old... I'm a Gen X pastor and I know a lot of... In Branson, this

isn't going to make sense to a lot of you, but if you look at church culture around the nation, it makes total sense. My job right now is to be considering and thinking through and planning for the person who will take my place. You understand that. I think that is stewardship, that's leadership; I'm supposed to be doing that. Now, the generation behind me is what we call the Millennial generation and sometimes they exhaust me. I've shared that very openly up here because we think from two completely different worlds.

I must be talking about it enough with Amy and processing through it enough when I talk about conversation about leadership and all that in the church. I'm always talking about how we come from two completely different worlds. I'm a Gen X pastor, but probably have more Ron Cunningham baby boomer tendencies in me. I probably lean more boomer than even Xer. But I must have been saying so much over the course of the week that when Carson and I were having a conversation... Carson is my 11-year-old. He came up to me and goes, "Dad, I know you would be totally disappointed if one day I turned out to be a millennial." Millennials, don't get mad at me. Lighten up Millennials. I had to tell him, "Technically, Carson, you can't be a millennial. You don't fit in the year bracket."

But, Amy said, "I told you that you have to stop making fun of them because they don't like being made fun of." But I forgot that in conversations we're just having around the home, our children are watching and they're listening and then they are developing their world beliefs.

That's why Pastor Andy Stanley says this. I wish I could share all the quotes with you that I picked up, but these are the ones that struck a chord with what we are talking about.

"Many of you have grown weary and have lost heart and the reason is you have fixed your eyes on a political system, you have fixed your eyes on a political leader, you have fixed your eyes on the good ol' days, you have fixed your eyes on the economy, and you are growing weary and you need to knock it off! And I'll tell you why – you are scaring the children."

As we close out our time, let's really understand the scripture when it comes to what our role in government is. **We are not the first nation to prioritize man's leadership over God's authority.** Democrat or republican. We are not the first nation to do this. Israel went without a king for the first thousand years of their history. Why? It's because God was the one who would direct them. God was the one who would guide them. God was the one who would provide for them. God was the one taking care of them, but that wasn't good enough for them. And in their rebellious hearts, in their sin... The sin was not a king. That was part of God's plan because Jesus came from the royal line of David. That's another message that fits somewhere with the pre-tribulational message. The sin on behalf of the Nation of Israel was that they plainly rejected God as their authority.

We read this in 1 Samuel 8: 7, **...they have rejected Me from being king over them.** So, the question that's been posed through scripture and that we have today and some of you are struggling with right now is this: "How do I be a citizen of heaven and a citizen of the United States?"

If you have your Bibles, turn to Romans 13. In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul is going to share how you can be a citizen of heaven and a citizen in Rome. He's going to give a clear tutorial on government. Not

on an elected leader, but on government and the role of government and your role as a citizen within a government.

Here's what he says in Verse 1, **1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.** So, government has been ordained by God, it's been established by God Almighty. ***The authorities that exist have been established by God.*** Now, he is speaking to the Romans, to people who are subjects under one of the most evil emperors of all time, Nero, who cruelly persecuted Christians. And he's telling Christians to subject themselves to this authority, to submit to this authority. Even when the authority is evil, submit to it because here is the role of government. When I share this, some of you are going to be like, "I wish we would follow that." Me too.

2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. It's the job of government to punish evil and promote good. That's the role of government. It's that simple. If you were to boil it down, it's punish evil, promote good.

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right... Be a law-abiding citizen. Go 35 miles per hour as you pass Shoji Tabuchi and Imax. If you want to subject to the authorities of this town and of this community, you do what is right. How many of you, when you pass a police officer, your heart starts racing? That's because you are a pagan. If you're not speeding, you shouldn't be concerned. That's humorous, but that's truly what Paul is saying. If you're doing the right thing, you shouldn't have any fear because the role of the authorities is simply to promote good and punish evil.

...and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword... The common practice in Rome was capital punishment. It was decapitation. It was how they took you out. ***...for no reason.*** They bear the sword for capital punishment and to wage war, to protect the citizens within a community from those in the community and from those outside the community. The sword has been given to the government. It hasn't been given to you or I or to the church; it's been given to the government. The authority that has been established by God has the right to punish evil.

They are God's servants, agents of wrath... The next time you see a police officer, thank him for being a servant of God and an agent of wrath. Stop calling them cops. They are agents of wrath. They have guns and they have Tasers. They are ready to go. Those who protect us in the military, they are servants of God and agents of wrath. They are called, their duty, their job is to promote good and punish evil. ***...to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.***

5 Therefore... Because that is the role of government, let's look at the role of the citizen. ***...it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*** Just doing the right thing.

Now you're going to love Verse 6. In this next few months and into the beginning of the year, I want you to go to Romans 13: 6 where it says, **6 This is also why you pay taxes...** That's Verses 1 – 5. You're paying your taxes so we can have a military that promotes good and punishes evil. You're paying your taxes so we can have a police force that can protect you.

The job of government is not to create jobs. The job of government is to protect all of you in here who has created jobs. So, if people in this town are criminal and coming after your business and they are going to steal from you, it's the job of government to keep that from happening or to punish someone once it has happened. If you are doing something illegal in your business and making the competition unfair for other people in the town, if you're doing something illegal and not paying your taxes so you can offer your goods and services for a lower price, that should be punished.

Again, it's not the job of the government to create a job; it's the job of the government to protect those who are creating jobs. I know some of you want me to go on a whole long message on that one right there, but I'm not going to. We are going to stick with the big ideas today. **...for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes...** Let me say that again because some of you aren't with me on this point at all. So, give to everyone what you owe them. **...if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.** This is the role of a citizen. Pay your taxes. Be part of our government. Be part of our system. Don't back out and be like "Nope, I'm a follower of Jesus. I'm going to write in Jesus." Please don't write in Jesus on Tuesday. Come on.

The Apostle Paul then tells young Timothy there's something else we need to do and I hope we are all doing this right here. **1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority...** Whoever is elected on Tuesday, I hope the moment you find out who it is that will be our president in 2017, you will hit your knees and begin praying immediately. **...that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.**

1 Timothy 2

To end our time with hope and to end our time with unity, we're going to take the Lord's Supper. I'm going to ask you to prepare the elements. As you prepare the elements this morning, I'm going to ask that you just listen. Don't turn to Psalm 146, but in Psalm 146... This Psalm has been of such great encouragement to me over the last couple of weeks. I don't know how many times I read it over the last couple of weeks, but every time I read it, it just fills me up more and more and charged me up to say "I'm not going to be a parent that scares my children."

I want to read all of Psalm 146 for you and I hope that you read it today and tomorrow and Tuesday before you go in to vote. If you've already voted, I'm going to encourage you to begin praying now through Tuesday and then after Tuesday. Fill yourself with hope.

Psalm 146 – **1 Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, my soul. 2 I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save. 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.**

5 Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God. 6 He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, 8 the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. 9 The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

10 The Lord reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord.

And all of God's people said... Amen.