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**Thrones**  
**Leveraging Authority to Help Others Win**  
**Part 7 – Protecting Those Not in the Room**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

If you're brand new and visiting on spring break, we're really glad that you're here in Branson where we give you all four seasons in one week. We had to run errands yesterday, so we went to The Landing and there were a lot of people at The Landing in a snow storm. But, everybody had the same look of terror on their face.

If you're here, you're picking up in the middle of a series that we are taking all the way to Easter called *Thrones*. What do you do when you find out you're the most powerful person in the room? How do you leverage your authority to help others win? We've talked to parents on how to help their child win. We've talked to the husband on how to help their wife win. We've talked to employers on how to help their employee win. Last week, we looked at how to help your congregation win. Next week, we're talking to grandparents. Get your grandparents here. Grandparents – *How to Help Your Grandchildren Win*.

Last week, we hit the light topic of gluttony. We thought we would continue with a nice light topic of gossip. What do you do with gossip and slander? Today, we're talking about when you find out you are the most powerful person in the room, how do you protect those that are not in the room? This is a responsibility that every leader faces. This is a responsibility that all of us, whatever authority that has been placed upon us... We have a responsibility to protect those not in the room. Here's what we know about those who are the most powerful in the room:

**We are often asked to choose sides.** Does anybody know what I'm talking about? Often, someone will come to us... Another way of looking at this is those who are present want us to choose their side over the one who is absent. What do you do? What should you do when asked to choose the side of the one present over the one absent.

Just to make sure we are hitting everyone in the room today and over at the chapel, let's start with one I think all of us can understand: **Parents with children.** What do you do when one of your children come to you and they want you to choose their side over a sibling. A lot of you grew up in homes where your parents told you to go work it out. "I don't want to be bothered with this." How many of you remember that? How many of you remember when your dad couldn't figure out which of your siblings was at fault so he just spanked all of you? Those were good days. Dad didn't want to choose a side so "You can work it out or I'll just spank all of you." This happens often.

Parents with adult children will tell you the same thing. your adult child wants you to side with them over another. How do you protect the child who is not in the room?

The same thing happens with grandparents, especially if your grandchildren visit. How do you keep your grandchildren from speaking ill of their cousins? A grandparent has the responsibility to make sure those who are absent are protected.

We have **teachers with students**. For hours a day, five days a week, some of you find yourself as the most powerful person in the room and you have all these little humans gathered around you. Children will constantly come to you, one at a time, wanting to tell you something to take their side. I was always the type of student that I was smart enough to know that the first one to the teacher wins. I want to get there and get my side in before the next student does. But, you as a teacher have a responsibility.

**Bus drivers**. You've got a few hours a day where you're the most powerful person on the bus. You've got to leverage your authority to help the students on that bus win.

**Counselors or pastors with spouses**. I always love to meet with a couple rather than a spouse. When you meet with a spouse, you've got to be careful. I'm not saying husband or wife over the other here, but let's say I meet with the wife and she then goes back to the husband and shares with the husband the stuff I said that she liked. She goes back and says, "Well, Ted agreed with me when I told you..." Now wait a second; this is why I want you both in the room because if we're not careful, you will go back and think I'm an ally for you and not your husband. I'm an ally for both of you. I want to protect the husband, I want to protect the wife who is not in the room and if I can gather them altogether, that's even better.

**Principals with parents**. How about this? A parent wants to come and meet with you about another kid in the class. I don't think any principal has ever had a meeting with a parent about a teacher. If you're a good principal, what does a principal do? He calls the teacher in. The principal, at that moment, has a responsibility to protect those not in the room.

**Employers with employees**. "I just heard so and so makes..."

"Let's talk about this. We don't need to talk about that person; let's talk about you. Let's talk about those and with those who are in the room."

**Theater owners with entertainers**. How do you protect other entertainers in this town who are absent? I don't know if you know this, but we live in a pretty small town. I've heard some rumors this week and I'm going to put a few of them up here on the board. We're going to fact check some of these rumors. I'm not going to put them up here, but could you imagine? And it saddens me, but I'm asking the Lord to start with me because I, personally, this week, have a deep conviction going. I don't do a good enough job protecting those who are not in the room. I need to do a better job of shutting down an entertainer when he starts slamming another entertainer.

**Pastors with other pastors.** I want pastors in this town to guard me. If I were to come to them and speak ill of another pastor, I hope they would shut me down. That we wouldn't speak ill of other churches. That we wouldn't speak ill of other pastors. That we wouldn't speak ill of other schools or other coaches or other players. That we would protect those not in the room.

If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to James 4 and sit there for just a second. We're going to start with the words of Jesus as Jesus tells where gossip and slander and speaking ill of other people comes from. We're told in the scripture that the tongue has the power of life and death. Your tongue, your words can build up people. Your tongue can reconcile and restore relationships. Your tongue can tear down people. Your tongue can tear down relationships and destroy close friendships. Where does that come from?

Jesus says this in Matthew 15: 19: **For out of the heart...** It's the same idea we get in Proverbs 4: 23 that says, **Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.** In other words, every word you speak and every action you take flows from your heart.

Jesus says, "It's not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, but it's what comes out of a man that makes him unclean." And then he gives us a list. **For out of the heart comes evil thoughts...** Now look at this list. If you've ever wondered what list slander of gossip finds itself on, it's this one right here. **...murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.**

The dictionary definition of gossip is simply this: *To indulge in idle talk or rumors about others; spreading of sensational stories.* Don't we all like going there. "Did you hear what so and so said?" "Did you hear what happened this week with the City Council?" Don't we all lean in when a sensational story hits us? In the Old Testament, the term and the idea of slander this was this definition: *To give an evil report about someone.* You see that definition and you may think that's speaking falsely about someone, but let me tell you this. A sensational story, gossip, a rumor can be true, given for the purpose of tearing someone down. In the Greek, the term means this: *To speak against someone.*

We have this great passage in James 4: 11-12 that is going to speak to the church specifically about what we're to do. **11 Brothers and sisters...** Brothers and sisters in Christ. We're thinking about putting these titles on our bathrooms. Instead of men and women, we are going to say brothers and sisters. Anyway... Don't you hate those public restrooms where you have to figure out which one to go into because they're being clever? I hate those. If you've been to these chicken restaurants... How many of you have walked into the hen's room? I don't need a biology lesson; I need to go to the bathroom. Hens is the women, in case you need to know. I walked into one and the lady goes, "One of us is in the wrong place." I said, "It says men's. She said, "It said hens." I don't know why I went there with brothers and sisters on the bathrooms. Anyway... let's stay focused

**...do not slander one another.** Do not speak against. Just keep it that simple. **Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them...** Write down Matthew 7 in the note of your Bible. Don't judge one another. Pay more attention to what's going on in your life than what's going on in the life of another person. Don't look at the speck in your brother's eye while you have a gargantuan log sticking

out of your face. Focus on the log sticking out of your face, not the speck in your brother's eye. This is very important.

...**speaks against the law and judges it.** Keep this in mind. When you speak against a brother or sister in Christ, you're not just speaking against that individual; you're speaking against Almighty God, the one who gave the law. **When you judge the law, you are not keeping it...** Some believe this points back to Leviticus where Jesus quotes in Matthew as well where he says love your neighbor as yourself, speaking specifically against that. **...but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge...** So, you're speaking against the person, you're speaking against the law, and you're speaking against the law giver, the one who gave it. **...the one who is able to save and destroy.** In other words, when you speak against a brother or sister in Christ, you are removing God from his rightful place. In your heart and mind, you are beginning to believe you can sit in that place and James is saying no, you can't. **But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?**

The scripture has a lot of different terms to speak of the gossip. Let's look at just a few of them. There is the **whisperer**. This is "I'm going to speak in a low voice because I only want you to hear this. So now I have incriminating information on someone. I want you to lean in and I'm going to share it just loud enough for you to hear it."

Let me tell you something. You always need to be cautious of the person who is going to share something with you and before they do, they look over their shoulder. Always be suspicious of that person. When you're the most powerful person in the room... If they are doing this with you about another person, they are going to leave that room and do this to another person about you. You have to be on guard when you're the most powerful person in the room.

How about this next one? **Busybodies**. We get this one. Paul shares this with young Timothy in dealing with the church. You're not going to like his solution, but I encourage you that when you have time this week, read 1 Timothy 5. What do you do about that lady that's going from house to house, stirring it up? What do you do with that single lady who's going from house to house and the term there is *idle talk*. Do you know what Paul says? You're not going to like it; it doesn't fit with our culture too well. He says you need to get married and have babies. Read it. I'm not making that up. Do you know why? It's because when you have a family, you don't have a lot of time to be messing around with other families. Some of you are like, "I had all sorts of free time and then I had this little human and this human sucks everything out of my life I could have to give towards meddling."

And that's the next one. **Meddler**. A meddler is someone who's into a situation that has nothing to do with them. When you're the most powerful person in the room and you're thinking about those who are absent, you need to be thinking about the person and the information they're giving you and start with the question: "Why do you even care?" "Why is this any of your business?" The meddler.

**Malicious gossips.** The word used here is often translated to *the devil*.

Now, we are going to look at five lessons that Proverbs gives us. We are going to take out of these lessons what you do when you are the most powerful person in the room and someone is coming in and asking you to choose their side over the one who is absent.

Proverbs 11: 13 - ***A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.*** You want to know who is standing right in front of you. Is this someone you can trust? I could go around with the mic and ask all sorts of questions in here. "Tell me about someone who betrayed a trust." "Tell me about someone who took incriminating information about you and shared it in a way that brought damage to you, to your family, to your reputation." I believe this is one reason and I submit to you one reason why divorce is so painful. It's because someone who has the most intimate of knowledge and information about you now has that and you sit and wonder what they are going to do with it. I've sat with couples and he or she will share something. They're thinking they're just going to get it out there. They're not sharing it to bring reconciliation to the relationship; they're sharing it to hurt the person they are sitting next to. I've had plenty of moments with couples where he or she will say something and the other one can't believe they told me that. A trustworthy person... You have to understand a gossip is someone that cannot be trusted.

Scripture goes on to say, in Proverbs 18: 8, ***The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.*** We need to understand about gossip and about slander that we all love it, we all enjoy it. I asked the Welcome Team to hand these out when you came in. It's my favorite morsel. It's the Andes candy mint. When these show up at the end of the Olive Garden meal... I only go to Olive Garden because of these right here.

I can buy as many of these as I want, but when they show up free in the check, your first thought is to look around at all the other people at the table and say, "You're not going to eat yours are you?" They are morsels. They may be losing right now as a morsel to me to the Dove Salted Caramel Dark Chocolate, which is of the Lord. Have you had Dove Salted Caramel Dark Chocolate? We couldn't afford to give everybody one of those today. We did the pricing and we're kind of on a budget around here. Amy bought a bag of them. She keeps them in her purse now for when I do something good.

I love Andes candies and we gave you one. Here's what we want you to do with it today: don't eat it. We want you to hold it. We want you to take it home, but we do not want you to eat this morsel that you were handed today. Some of you are going, "This is the worst church ever. This is the worst sermon I've ever heard." We want you to keep it because here's the bottom line. When someone approaches you this week to discuss another person, don't taste the morsel.

If you really struggle with gossip, I want you to take this and just put it in your pocket all week. Just leave it there in your pocket. Feel it every time you go into your pocket. Kind of mush it around and feel it. But, I don't want you to taste it. Why? It's because the proverb is saying that morsel is what we feel when someone is bringing us something good about another person.

Let's admit that when someone comes to us to talk about another person, we are relieved it's not about us. That's one of the reasons we like it. Raise your hand if you've ever tried or you ever eaten one Pringle potato chip. A real American eats the whole tin. That's what we do; it's our patriotic duty to eat

the entire thing. You've never opened a can of Pringles, reached down and picked one up and ate it and then put the lid back on. It's impossible. You can't do it. You open the lid and you think you're going to eat somewhere between one or fifty. That's exactly what rumors are. I'm not going to be satisfied with just a little piece of information. I want more. Give me more. This is like Cool Ranch Doritos. Bring it on. I'm going to eat half of a bag. How many of you are at a place where you can't get a bag of potato chips anymore and eat it. You have to put it into a little bowl or you will devour the whole bag. Do you know what that's called? Let's go back to last week a little bit. That's called self-discipline. "I'll have a few chips; I'm just not going to eat the whole bag." With gossip, don't start with the first chip. Don't taste the morsel.

I just want to be known as this kind of leader right here. I want to be known as a "Don't even think about it" kind of leader, parent, and friend. I have a friend in here right now who is a "Don't even think about it" kind of leader. I know we've read all sorts of leadership books and blogs and articles: 17 Things to do to be a better this and 22 things to do to be more approachable as a pastor and 6 ways to get to retirement faster, which is the one I go to a lot faster than I go to all these over here. We read all this stuff and the number one thing we hear about leadership is to be approachable, be accessible. This is one area I don't want to be approachable. I want people to know "Don't even think about taking gossip to that guy."

Do you want to be a "Don't even think about it" kind of entertainer? Don't you? Like someone is going to start talking about another entertainer in this town and they know not to do it with you because you will shut them down.

I want my kids to know "Don't go to dad to say something about Carson." "Don't go to dad to say something about Corynn because he'll spank us both." Dad doesn't tolerate it.

As a friend, I'm going to protect my friends. If you speak out against a friend, I want to help them.

Proverbs 12: 28 – ***A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.*** This is important to me. I always love when my friend does this. If we are gathered around a table and a name comes up and we begin speaking about them... If it turns in a direction that's going to be gossip or slander about that person, my friend taps on an empty chair and says, "Don't you wish that person were sitting here right now?" That's a "Don't even think about it" kind of leader. It's not tolerated; we're going to shut it down. I believe when you're the most powerful person in the room, you have the responsibility to shut gossip down. Be known as a leader that gossip stops with you. Because someone is coming in going, "I've got this information and I hope it brings us closer together and I don't care that it's going to destroy your relationship with him or with her."

When you are the most powerful person in the room, speak up for those who are absent. Speaks words of high honor about them. I think speaking up for a person is different than speaking for a person. I don't need to know what this person would say or do in this situation or with this topic or opinion, but I'm going to speak words of high value about the person who's not in the room right now. Maybe we do that at lunch this week. If you're a teammate getting ready to bash another teammate to a coach, what if the coach just pulls up a chair and says, "Why don't we invite him to sit right here?"

When you're the most powerful person in the room, **invite those who are absent to attend**. Maybe you're just a phone call and you hear the gossip coming in. You say, "Hey, do you mind, with this person you're getting ready to talk about, if I dial them in right now." "What! Why would you do that?" "Because it's going to change everything about what you're about to say."

Or how about this? We invite the person... Let's pretend he's right here. What if we paused this conversation and invite this person to attend. If that way doesn't work, what do you do? You invite those to attend. Let's bring this person in. A wife bashing her husband, let's bring the husband in. A husband bashing his wife, let's bring the wife in. When you're the most powerful person in the room, you have an obligation.

Proverbs 26: 20 puts it this way. ***Without wood a fire goes out, without a gossip, a quarrel dies down.*** Don't be the leader that adds more fuel to the fire. Be that powerful person in the room that removes the fuel and it starts to die down.

Protecting those who are not in the room does not mean you don't talk about them; it's just what you say about them that is important. The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 4: 29, as he's talking about anger and about relationships and ***don't let the sun go down upon your wrath***, he says this clearly. When we're speaking about the other person, ***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs...***

This is important because... Let me just use Branson for a second because it's kind of low hanging fruit when it comes to the rumors and the gossip. I'm exhausted by it, to be really honest with you. I heard it this week. An elected official in town asked me if I had heard what so and so did. I said, "First of all, I'm going to stop you right there. That's a friend. I like that person. And I think that person is doing a fantastic job."

***But only what is helpful for building others up...*** I saw this modeled for years between two of our resorts here in town, between the GM of Big Cedar and the GM of the Chateau. They are friends. I remember I had dinner with them a couple of times. I loved how well they got along. Sometimes in business we want to tear down the competition. I believe it's to your advantage to build up the competition. They had a brilliant concept with this. I remember I go, "You guys get along for being major competitors. Tell me how that works." I'll never forget when Tony Shill said, "You know what? We could sit around here and fight an argue over a piece of the pie or we can spend time together figuring out how to make the pie bigger."

This is how you get along. And when you would talk to Tony, he would build up the other people in town. When you would talk to Stephen, he would build up the other people in town. This is helpful for building others up. Let me be a pastor who speaks well of the other churches in town. I want to be known that when you come to me and want to give me a little morsel about something going on in another church, I want to shut it down. That's because we used to be that other church and a lot of times still are that other church.

Some of you are going to get the opportunity to practice this message on gossip in the car on the way home from church today. I'll be your first one to test it on. If somebody starts bashing something that's going on, just hold up the Andes candy and go, "We ain't eating it." If somebody goes after our mayor, "We ain't eating it." If somebody goes after a show in town, "We ain't eating it." If somebody goes after a fellow dancer or singer, "I ain't eating it." I think we should all carry around Andes candies and pass them out all week and tell people, "Don't eat it."

Because what you hear coming out of my mouth... Let me tell you that God has convicted me of this because when I'm not the source of your frustration, it makes me feel good. And that's a sensational story I want to hear. But, when you hear me talking about other churches in town... Listen, I feel we've done our part to send plenty of people to other churches in town, let's be really clear about that. We're not against helping other churches grow around here. I had one guy come after me saying something about feeling competitive with our church. I'm like, "You should be saying thank you. I know a hundred people from our church at your church right now. You're welcome."

Can we just be helping one another and have our words be helpful for building others up, according to their need that it may benefit those who listen.

Proverbs 20: 19 – ***A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.*** When you're inviting the other person, the absent, into the room, it may not work. A third approach I always say... If you can't bring them in on a phone call and if you can't bring them in in person, what if whatever you're sharing with me now, I'm going to go share with them as soon as this meeting is done. If you're talking about somebody else, I'm just going to share with them what you're sharing with me. That should shut them down.

If that doesn't work, there's a fourth approach. When you're the most powerful person in the room, you may need to leave the room to protect the absent. You may need to call the meeting off. You may need to end the conversation altogether. I think that's okay. You don't have to hate that person. It doesn't mean you have to yell at that person. I've done it a couple of times in the last few months. I've had to state to the people that the conversation was over. "If you won't go by some of these guidelines trying to protect the other person, we're calling it quits. Maybe we can pick it up later." You can thank them for coming in. You can tell them "Rest assured that the thing I'm asking from you... If I go talk to the other person, I'm going to make sure I don't talk badly about you, I'm not going to bash you. Let's all get in a room because the purpose of relationships is to be reconciled, not to be tearing one another down."

A few years ago, Bill Rogers, an elder at our church who was a pastor for like 78 years or something. He was a long-time pastor and one of my favorite guys on the planet. He retired from pastoring and he was clearing out his office. He was an elder here for a number of years. He is now up in Springfield, living next to his kids. He came into my office one day holding this plaque. He handed it to me and said, "I was just cleaning out some boxes and I saw this and I said, 'Ted needs this.'" He handed it to me. It simply says "Those who are absent are protected here." It was probably five or six years ago.

Bill taught me a lot about leadership. One of the things he taught me about leadership that I loved... He said, "Ted, when you are the most powerful person in the room, you should be the last one talking. Because if you are the most powerful person in the room and you start talking, everybody else will give their thoughts and ideas filtered through what you've said." That was just great wisdom from a seasoned veteran. He said, "When you are the most powerful person in the room, make sure those who are absent are always protected." He said, "Put this on the front of your desk and let people know this is a gossip-free zone." You're not going to do it with me. We're not going to betray confidences. I'm going to be a "Don't even think about it" kind of leader and this is a "Don't even think about it" kind of room.

When you leave here today, everybody gets... I asked if we could make these wood plaques for everyone and Denise said no. So, you get this little piece of paper. She said we'll do book marks. It's simply says, "Those who are absent are protected here." Maybe you can go plaster that on your refrigerator this week. Put it outside your cubical. Put it over the top of your computer at work.

On the back, there is a message for those who are wanting to talk to you. I see some coaches in the room. Coaches, you need this on your clipboard. Hold it up. The front is for what people see when they approach you're and on the back, it simply says, "Don't taste the morsel." That's for you. Don't receive it. Maybe at your home, teaching your kids the principles that we've learned this morning, you flip this thing back and forth. I think every mom in here should go bake a big plate of cookies and put them on the center of the kitchen table and say, "We're not touching those cookies all week." Make the kids feel the pain so they can learn the lesson. Don't taste the morsel. We are going to be leaders.

I hope you do this in Branson, Missouri this week. If somebody wants to share a little morsel with you, shut it down. If somebody wants to speak ill of an elected leader, shut it down. If somebody wants to speak ill of a theater, shut it down. If somebody wants to speak ill of an entertainer, shut it down. If you meet a pastor who wants to speak ill of another pastor, shut me down. Do it. Don't taste the morsel.

I loved it after the first service, six senior adults came up... First service is not technically the senior adult service, but it was this morning, I can tell you that. They were all up at 5:00 am watching Fox News. The time change didn't matter to them. They came up and said, "Boy, did we needed this." They were all from out of town: Minnesota, Iowa... They were from all over the place. They said, "There's a lot of turmoil going on where we own our property." They own timeshares. "And all week we've been speaking against people and we needed to watch our tongue this morning, which holds the power of life and death."

So, when you leave here today, please pick this up and put it wherever you need to remind yourself to not taste the morsel. Reach in and pick out that warm chocolate... After a week, you may eat it, but we are doing this for seven days, not tasting the morsel.

Father, it is the name of Jesus that we thank you for Woodland Hills and for what you continue to do in this family. Father, I pray for the rooms I walk into this week where there will be plenty of leaders far more powerful than I; they will be the most powerful person in the room... If death begins to flow out of my mouth, I pray that they would shut me down.

Father, as I walk into rooms where I'll have the most authority in the room and the gossip comes out or the slander comes out, I don't want the morsel. I don't even want to taste it. May I be known as a "Don't even think about it" kind of leader.

I pray for all the bus drivers, all the teachers, all the entertainers, all the business owners, all the leaders, all the elected officials, all the ministry leaders, that as they walk into rooms this week, they would be on guard and in an honoring way, protect those who are absent.

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