



Thrones
Leveraging Authority to Help Others Win
Part 9 – Caring For Those You Lead
Pastor Ted Cunningham

If you're brand new, we're leveraging authority to help others win. We're talking about what it means to help our children win, our spouse win, how to help your grandchildren win, how to help employees win. Today, we are going to be talking about caring for those that you lead. What do you do when you're the most powerful person in the room? We talked a lot about the most powerful person, but we haven't talked about powerful rooms. Let's start there for a bit because when you think about powerful rooms, I always come to this scene right here. The oval office – where healthcare goes to die. You can't let that low hanging fruit go when that was the news cycle all week. There were other things happening in the world, just so you know.

I had the opportunity in the 90s, under the Clinton administration, to go to the Oval Office. He was in Europe, so we actually got a little more access. A friend of mine in college... his dad was on the secret service and there was nobody in the room, but just walking in the room, I was just overwhelmed with the stuff that had happened there, the history that had been made there, the decisions that had been made there. You feel power when you're standing in this room.

Some of you feel power and maybe you feel intimidated when you're in this room. We call this the boardroom. The big decisions that are being made, the CEO, the CFO, managers, directors that are gathered around this table... They're making calls, they're making decisions. Even when you're the most powerful person in this room, how do you care for the others in the room?

And for many of you, this right here... Don't forget that, as Mom and Dad, you're the most powerful person in this room. For how many of you did your family room looked a little bit like this as you left the house this morning? We don't leave the house until our kids tidy up everything in shelves and put it all away.

For some of you, you aren't even thinking family room, boardroom, Oval Office; you were thinking this right here. Some of you have to remember you are the most powerful person on your drive in today.

My grandma had this nickname for me. I come from a family that made up words. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? My grandma's nickname for me was Punkerdunk. I don't know where she got it, but when I would spend the night at her house, she would wake me up and go, "Good morning, Punkerdunk, get up; we've got a big day."

I kind of picked that up and I have this term and it's called *podunker*. Does anybody want to know what that means? Podunker refers to that person who drives slow on 76. That's a podunker. I don't know where I came up with it, but this morning we were driving to church on 76, even before we got to the Taneycomo bridge. I've got about two miles I have to wrestle with. About four cars ahead of us was a small, white SUV. I have to be careful on Sunday morning, knowing that with the size church we have and the size town we're in, I've got about a 20% chance of the person I'm behind ending up here at Woodland Hills. So, we're driving and I can't even see the person, but the kids are hearing me go, "We are dealing with a podunker this morning." And we pull up to the light and it was Pat Kershaw who goes to our first service so...

When you're the most powerful person in the room, do you assert your authority or leverage your authority. Today, we are going to look at when you're the most powerful person in the room. Whether it's the board room, the family room, the minivan or SUV, when you're the most powerful person, what do you do? Do you assert authority or do you leverage your authority? Is it your way or the highway? "I'm speaking now. Everybody else shut up." As parents, what do we do to assert our authority? Do we just get louder, repeat, or, as we're trying to learn in this series, are we getting better at leveraging our authority?

Really, the big idea today is making sure people know you care before you share, making sure they know they are important to you. In the spirit of the NCAA tournament and going to the final four, I turned it on last night for about two minutes and I was rooting for Oregon and the only reason I was rooting for Oregon is because their uniforms are awesome. Have you seen those uniforms? They're green. If you are in high definition television, they bounce off the screen at you. Amy came in and goes, "Who are you rooting for?" I said "The green team. We are definitely going for that green team; they look powerful."

It took me back. If you don't know this, if you are new to our church, I was one of the greatest athletes of the 20th Century. Google it. I was awesome. I actually was not, but my professional sports career started in the 7th grade. I showed up and joined the basketball team. Eighteen kids showed up for tryouts. You know how it works; they only had 16 uniforms, so two kids were going to get cut. That put tons of pressure on me because I kept looking at the kid and thinking *He doesn't even have asthma so he's probably going to have a shot to get it and I'm going to be number eighteen and left out.*

I was a party on wheels. I wasn't good, but I was keeping the crowd going and keeping us all loose and limber. The coach decided we were no going to cut anybody, but I'm thinking *You only have sixteen uniforms.* Well, we had the old uniforms, so two kids had to wear the 20 year old uniforms with shorts that... Does anybody know what I'm talking about? This is terrible. I think our church reaches just as many non-athletes as we do athletes. Who do you think one of the two guys were in the old uniforms? You're looking at one right here.

What you need to know about me and sports is I never wanted to be responsible for a loss so I would never take a shot. I was point guard on the B team. There would be the A game and then they'd all be tired and done, but we would play one quarter game called the B game. I was the star, me and the other kid in the other old uniform.

I was the point guard, but I would never shoot. I would never take a shot. I would always pass it because I'm wasn't going to be responsible for our loss. This drove my coach crazy and he was also my 7th grade English teacher. All I ever wanted to do was want the person to pass to. I was getting rid of the ball as quickly as possible. That was the sum total of my basketball career. I would dribble down the court and my coach would be screaming at me every time, "Take the shot!" You know when you're called by your last name, that when he's serious. "Cunningham, you will shoot the ball!"

I would look at him like, *Watch me. I ain't shooting the ball. I'm going up there and I'm going to pass this thing off.* I'll never forget coming down that court... I know this was totally illegal and he should have been kicked out of the game. He came out onto the court, almost to the middle of the court, to get right in my face. But it was the B game and I don't even think we had people officiating the game. I think we were just kind of out there playing horse. I'll never forget him getting right in my face. He goes, "Cunningham, you will not pass that ball; you will shoot that ball!" I'm like, "Wow! You're getting aggressive with this!"

I'll never forget... You can look this up. I'm sure it's in the history books. Traughber Junior High, Oswego, Illinois. After the game, I'll never forget him getting in my face. "There are all these other people to worry about; you shouldn't be worrying about me, Coach, let's just face it. I'm never going to go far in this sport."

He spent more time with me. Do you know why? He was more concerned about my character than he was the win or the loss. I'll never forget him. He said. "The next game, if you don't shoot the ball, you're never playing again." I just remember how firm he got. I feel like that was a little bit asserting your authority there, but do you know why he was great and the coach is typically the most powerful person on the team? He did such a good job leveraging his authority. I knew I mattered to him. He cared about me and that's the reason I was wearing the old uniform. He could have cut me and not have to deal with me, but in 7th grade, he put me on the B team as the point guard. I would want to argue with him like, "I'm a phenomenal passer. I'm like one of the best passers you're got." But he was constantly coming at me, but do you know what? I started following his leadership because I knew he cared deeply.

Today, as we talk about the difference between assert authority and leveraging authority, we are going to look at it in the context of the Apostle Paul, whose leadership is at stake here in Thessalonica. The Thessalonian Christians... You had some pagan gentiles, you had some religious leaders who were wanting to undermine his authority and wanted to kind of chop him down and keep him down. He comes at it and has to explain to them why he does what he has to do. You're going to see a beautiful picture, centered around the gospel of Jesus Christ, of the difference of asserting authority and leveraging authority, of pushing your agenda on someone or your message on someone and leveraging.

We want the people we lead to know we care. That's the key for this morning. To give you some background before we get to 1 Thessalonians 2, in 1 Thessalonians, to the Thessalonian Christians, he's going to kind of defend his apostleship. He's going to defend what he does in presenting the gospel to them. He's going to draw on something that happened to him in Philippi.

In Acts 16, to give you a little background before we get to 1 Thessalonians 2, we want to look at what actually happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi. **22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas...** because they were sharing the gospel of Jesus. Sharing the gospel of Jesus, in that day, meant you were beaten, thrown in prison, and killed. ...**and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped...** which was common before a flogging took place. They were to be stripped **and beaten with rods** so that their flesh would be exposed. **23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks,** beaten and imprisoned.

From there, we are going to pick up in 1 Thessalonians 2 and we are going to look at Verses 1 – 8. As we jump into this, I want to ask you how do you deal with criticism when you share your faith in Jesus? When you talk to family, friends, or strangers, isn't it something how we can get the wrong look and it prevents us from ever sharing with that person again? We can go home for Christmas, declare our faith, share the good news of Jesus, and someone says something like, "I don't want to hear that anymore," they begin to shut us down, and we're done.

What Paul is going to say is, "After what just happened to us in Philippi and now what awaits us here in Thessalonica, as we come here, we're going to face opposition like we faced there, and let me tell you something, that opposition for us is fuel. We're not going to stop talking about the good news."

And that's where we pick up in 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8. **1 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain...** Or it was not empty. There was great purpose in why we came here. **2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi...** Beaten, flogged, imprisoned. ...**as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition.**

Let me give you the gospel so that as it comes up today in the text, you'll know what we are talking about. The gospel is simply Jesus, the Righteous One, died for our sins, and, according to the scriptures. He was buried. That was his death certificate. He then rose again, according to the scriptures, and was seen by many. The only condition for salvation is simply this: Faith alone in Christ alone. Let me run through that again because that's what we're declaring as the gospel. Jesus died, the Righteous One died, according to the scriptures, for our sins. He was buried, that was his death certificate. He rose again and, according to the scriptures, was seen by many and salvation is faith alone in Christ alone. And that is what Paul is there to proclaim to the Church of Thessalonica. They just declared that gospel. It has been done and it brings about floggings and imprisonment.

3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit... Now this is important because the word *deceit* there is also used to talk about a fishing lure. When I saw that this week I got excited about it. I thought we should do a whole message on different types of fishing lures. I'm in a fishing mode right now. We're getting into spring and I'm getting all excited. Fishing is just trying to trick the fish. You're using something that looks like a minnow, something that looks like a crawfish, something that smells good that isn't even food. If you are fishing for trout in Taneycomo and you put the Berkley bait on there, there is nothing nutritious about that. You're just trying to get them to see it and smell it because trout are always nibbling...

I could do a whole thing; I've been watching YouTube videos all week. Amy said, "You're kind of getting off the point. You need to stick back on the gospel." But it's deceit. There are many that attend church thinking this all about bait and switch. "They are saying one thing, but they want something else." Some of you may have even been to a church where it felt like that and he's going to bring this out even more. But we are not here in vain. What we are doing here today has real purpose. That purpose is for you to understand that if you've never placed faith in Jesus... Faith alone is Christ alone. If you've never placed faith in Jesus and you're not a Christian, we want you to clearly understand from us that you are of your father the devil and a child of darkness and we want to see you go from darkness to light. We want to see you go from death to life. There is no trickery going on here. There was fog during the worship, but there's no fog and smoke and mirrors and all of that going on. It's about the gospel and we want it to save you and change your life and for you to live your life out of that gospel.

4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel... The death and resurrection of Jesus. ...so we speak, not as pleasing men... We don't give this message out waiting for this response to do something for us. ...but God who examines our hearts. 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed... Your translation may read the cloak of greed.

We know we reach many who may have watched televangelists for years and their like. "You know they talk a little bit about the gospel, but then they spend the rest of their show selling us stuff. They are trying to get our money" and I understand. "I feel sometimes, Ted, there are a lot of preachers and teachers and televangelist who use the gospel, but they're coming after our wallet. I come into this church and I leave my wallet in the car. You ain't getting nothing out of me."

He's saying, "This is why I took a job." Paul took a trade on. Why? He wanted people to know they were there for the gospel, not to make money off of them, not to line their pockets. ***God is witness— 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.*** He says, "We didn't do that. We didn't do that and that's not going to be the mark of our ministry. The mark of our ministry is going to be leveraging authority." And here's where we get into the text where he's going to talk about how much he cares for them and what you and I, follower of Jesus, should have for those who do not know the Lord. We should have a deep care.

Maybe the issue with sharing your faith is simply this: you're sharing with people who think you don't care. Maybe your mom and dad, friend, or a stranger... Again, I grew up in a church where we knocked on doors, cold calls. People would come to the door early on a Saturday morning, barely awake, with their cup of coffee. "Good morning, can I help you?"

And our first question was "If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?"

"It's a little early for that deep of a question don't you think? And besides, I don't even know you."

I'm like, "Well, let us come in and show you how much we care."

I think there's another way. The Baptists are going, "No, no, that's the way. And it has to be done on Thursday nights from 7:00 to 9:00; that's when you share your faith."

Paul is saying there is another way. "We didn't assert our authority with you and cram our message down your throat, this is what we did." ***7 But we proved to be gentle among you...*** Caring people are gentle. Caring people want you to know that you matter to them, that they really are interested in your life. He said, "We didn't assert our authority; we were gentle." And then, can you think of a better word picture to talk about gentleness? ***...as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.*** "That's how we brought this message to you."

I know some of you grew up in a church where when the preacher would teach about hell, it was very confusing because every time he talked about people going to hell, it sounded like he was excited people were going there. There was great enthusiasm about the death and the lost and depravity. We want you to get this and here's how we want you to get this: not in cramming it down your throat. ***8 Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God...*** Christ died, the Righteous One died for your sins, according to the scripture. He was buried. He rose again, according to the scriptures, and was seen by many, and salvation is faith alone in Christ alone. "We gave you that message and how did we do it? Not only did we give you that message," ***but also our own lives...*** Paul says, "We gave of ourselves so that you would know this isn't just about us. We don't want it to be about us" ***because you had become very dear to us.***

This is one thing I tell my pastor friends. I encourage you to stay in the community for more than a year or two. If you stay in a community for a year or two or three, you might not even know the people yet, let alone fall in love. This is one of the things about 15 years into Woodland Hills Family Church. Branson is home. Woodland Hills is home. This is family. I know you, I have affection for you, I care for you. Hopefully, you're developing the same affection for those around you. Hopefully, you're not jumping from church to church. Dig down, establish roots, develop an affection for a body of believers.

Paul says, "You had become so very dear to us" and if I can boil this all down to one statement, here is what I think Paul is reminding the Thessalonians of. "It's about you, not me. I'm not here for me; I'm here for you" is what he is saying. This is what I love about Woodland Hills. I love the progress we've been making with the teaching team. Nothing thrills me more than to know it's not about a guy; it's about you. It's about everyone that's sitting in here this morning.

Let's make this practical as we talk about you for just a second and leveraging your authority to show other people that you care. I just want to give you three practical ways to do it and three questions you can ask to show people that you care.

Care for those you lead by talking more about them than you. When you find yourself the most powerful person in the room, just listen, just get into the lives of other people. Simply ask this question: "How are things with you?" Some of you are going, "Ted, I'm in charge of 30 people where I work. Ted, I'm in charge of a company that has hundreds of people and we've got stuff to do. There's only so much of me to go around."

We live by this principle here at Woodland Hills that simply says "Do for one what you can't do for all." This week, care for one like you can't care for everybody. You can't stop by every single cubical and ask "How are you today; tell me what's going on," but you can do it with one.

A few months ago, I was at a church and I was in the green room. The sound guy was putting the microphone on me. The room was just full of pastors and directors and leaders of this church. The sound guy was putting the deal down my shirt and that's always fun to do. And then when they went to put the mic on... I always like to bark at them when they adjust the mic. They go through the roof; they're totally at a loss.

So, I had that little bit of fun with them and then I said, "How are things with you?" He says, "Are you talking to me?" "Yeah, I'm talking to you. Where are you from?" He gave me this look like *Why are you talking to me?* I would say at that moment he's feeling like *These are all my leaders from the church and everything and I'm just here to do this job.* But listen, you are a somebody. But this is it right here. Now we can admit this. He was shocked, he didn't know what to do, he had a hard time carrying on a conversation. Now we can admit that sound people can be a little weird, okay? (mic goes dead) Don't clap for that. That was Russell wanting you all to know that he is the most powerful person in the room.

I'm not going to ask you to raise hand, but if you are tourist here in town and you're probably staying in a hotel or a timeshare, you have a certain level of authority. You're paying for a room and you expect it to be cleaned. You're going to walk back to your room this afternoon or this evening and you're going to pass someone pushing a housekeeping cart. I just want to encourage you to practice. Before you even get home or back to your place of work or wherever your position may be, stop at the housekeeping cart and say, "How are things going with you today?" They're going to give you the same look. *Why are you talking to me?* It's because they are not used to it. What if you just stop and say, "Thank you?" In the first service, we must have had the whole housekeeping crew of Branson because they were all going, "Yep, we are people too."

With our kids... I've asked some of our hotel owners in the church what is appropriate, what is a good way to treat housekeeping staff? Here are the three things we have come up with as a family. 1) Thank those who clean your room in person. Stop by and shake their hand and thank them. 2) Tidy up the room a bit. Isn't it funny that I would never allow us to leave a room the way we sometimes leave it? Jim Gaffigan has a joke on this. If we ever get to our room and it's not clean, we turn into like kings. We call down and say, "My room has not been clean. Send up a man servant and burn a peasant village." Isn't that how we get? That's our entitlement we end up with. So, I told the kids to tidy up. When do you at home blow your nose in a tissue and then throw it on the floor? 3) So, we tidy up and then we tip. That's where I lose some of you. I asked what an appropriate tip would be. They said two to three bucks a night says thank you. So, I've now asked the kids to write a thank you letter when we leave hotels and sign it "slobs". No, don't sign it slobs, but we can be that way. No, tidy up, leave a thank you note and then tip.

What are you doing when you find yourself to be the most powerful person in the room? How are you showing that you care for others? If you're sitting in a meeting this week and someone rarely ever talks

because they feel like, “I’m the newest one here. I can’t really have an opinion.” Ask “How are you doing?”

Care for those you lead by asking for their opinion. Here’s the question... This is how simple this all gets. “What do you think?” You’re like, “Ted, I cannot open up that can of worms. We run a theater and every year we have our ushers’ meeting and everybody that works at concessions; there’s no way I’m opening up ‘What do you think?’ That will unleash fury and craziness and chaotic...”

Here’s where I think leaders get this all wrong. There are two types of leadership and we’re talking about them today right out of 1 Thessalonians 2. There is authoritative leadership and there is authoritarian leadership. Authoritative leaders leverage authority to help others win. Authoritative leaders care for others. Authoritarian leaders do not care for others or they just become so expedient or their company grows so large that they stop caring for others and they lead with this “It’s my way or the highway.”

Some of you are nodding because you’re thinking about your leader. I want you to continue to make this personal on you because we do this as parents. Do you want to know what “I told you so” is? That’s called asserting authority and that’s called authoritarian. A couple people came up to me after the first service today and said, “Can we rethink this whole thing on parenting because there are times as a parent that I need to be assertive.” Is that what you want to be known as: an authoritarian parent or an assertive parent or do you want to be known as a parent that leverages authority to help the child win? That’s authoritative.

Authoritative says, “Ultimately, the decision comes down to me. I have to make the decision; I’m responsible for it.” I have a friend that leads a department – I was trying to disguise where he works – at a theme park in our area. You don’t know which one I’m talking about. He says, “It wears me out because you want to do this, but at some point, there is just so much of this.” No, no, authoritative says “Ultimately the higher ups are counting on me and I have to make the final call, I have to make the decision, I have to lead this, but I can get input.”

Can I just tell you that one of the areas... You can ask the staff around here. One of the areas that I’m trying to work on is this right here. It’s easier to sit down and go, “We’re doing this, this, this, and this.” Authoritative takes a little more time. But, isn’t that what good leadership does? Time says “I care about you and I want your input and your thoughts. It’s doesn’t mean we are going to run with what you’re saying. It doesn’t mean that’s going to become the new policy, but I want to hear it.”

Again, I go back to this word Paul uses: *gentle*. “Like a mother cares for her child, that’s how we were among you. We wanted you to know we would actually give our lives for you.” That’s what Paul was saying. “If it comes down to that, I will die for what we’re doing here because that’s how much affection I have for you.” Boy, don’t I want to be that kind of leader?

Care for those you lead by offering them something you have. If you want to be known as a leveraging leader, not as one who asserts authority or has an authoritarian leadership style, you’re going to simply ask this question: “What do you need from me?”

As I thought back on all my bosses, I thought those were the ones that if they wanted me to perform more or I did my annual review in corporate America, they'd say, "Okay, here's the benchmark for next year, here's what we want you to hit." The good bosses would always say this: "And for you to get there, what do you need from me?" There is a lot you could need from someone as you're trying to take a step up.

But, I want to talk to the leaders. This includes parents and grandparent. To leverage your authority to care for others and to help others, it kind of boils down to three things.

Resources – This can include stuff, it can include money. It's like, "To accomplish this, I really need X amount of dollars to get more education. It would really help if I had these tools that I know you have and you don't really use anymore. Can I have those to perform at the next level?"

Knowledge – I think the older we get, the more we're not supposed to just be thinking about *How do I use this, what do I do with this*. If you care for other people in the room, you're going to spend time giving them what you know because they need your knowledge. This is mentoring. As we head towards our 40s, 50s and 60s, it's not just about what we're doing anymore, it's realizing we have a lot of young folks coming behind us and we better start handing off this knowledge to them.

Time – Another way you show them you care and "what do you need from me..." They simply say, "I just need time. Can I get some time with you? Can I spend time this week with you?" I love what Alex Himaya says. He comes here often from Tulsa to speak. He said, "If you're looking for a leader to invest in you, don't just call and ask him to meet you for coffee. Find out what they're doing and ask if you can get involved in what they're doing." That's one of the best ways for you to get the resources, knowledge, and time you need to lead well, to get better at whatever it is you're called to do.

This illustration is going to take us from these three practical points into what I really want to share with us as a body here at Woodland Hills. I want to take you to one of my favorite scenes in our community. [picture of people fly fishing] I'm back into fly fishing, folks, so I need you to know that between now and Easter, that's what you're getting. Easter is going to be called *Fly Fishing for Jesus*. That's what the whole sermon is called. No, it's not.

Which outlet is this? Yell it out. There are three main outlets. This is outlet number two. This is the coveted outlet. There are about 1.3 million trout in this little area right here when they are not running water because this is the outlet from the hatchery. These are the coveted spots. If you've ever been down to Taneycomo... Again, I took a hiatus from fly fishing for like ten years until my daughter said, "Let's get back into it, Dad." I'm in and we're spending the time and the money and the knowledge, and the resources. But, it's for her. It is for my daughter. It is for her life and her wellbeing.

Can I just paint this picture for you? It's this scene of the very first time I took my daughter fly fishing. She put on waders and all she had was a rod. I didn't even take one down because I was just going to be her guide. We walked there and you need to know there are several old guys down there at the hatchery. They are down there fishing in this location every single day. I'm not making this up. One of them even told me, "I'm down here on average 300 times a year."

I was walking down a couple of weeks ago, and I heard the one guy say to his buddy, as he's driving off, "See you tomorrow." This is all they do. There's an old guy down there named Duffy. Does anybody here know Duffy? We had a couple people in the first service. I love Duffy. Duffy goes in the Taneycomo with no waders. I told Corynn, "He must not have the circulation he used to have. You'd last about 30 minutes in there just standing in there."

We walked down the stairs at outlet number two. We're walking down and Duffy... These old guys have been there so much that they've caught every fish in Taneycomo three times. They are to the point where it's a hassle to actually land the fish. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? After they hook one, the fun for them is seeing if they can get rid of it before they actually get it in. They're coming up with ways.

We're walking down the stairs and Duffy turns around and sees us. He calls out to Corynn, "Come here, take my spot." Just so you know, that's the best spot there and that's where Duffy was standing.

I said, "Oh, no, no, sir, that's okay, we're good."

He goes, "No, no, come here." Corynn goes down and stands by him and he's inspecting everything. He's got her line out and seeing how I tied on the drop shot and the fly. The guy standing over here is another buddy that fishes 300 time a year. He crosses the stream to see it. They're gathering stuff up out of their fly boxes. They're tying up her deal. I told Corynn, "Hey, I'll see you back in the car." I started heading back because I'm thinking I don't even need to be there anymore. I told Corynn, "You understand this is like hitting the lottery. Maybe not the big lottery, but at least a scratch off. This is a big deal. "Corynn, this is a like a \$300.00 to \$500.00 guide trip right now." I don't want to shut down the guide industry. Don't go looking for Duffy this afternoon. He'll have 300 people showing up for him.

She started catching fish minutes after being there. Why? It's because the pros were there. The guys who have been there, who have done it, who know it.

Last week we were there. I'm still pastoring, but I go down to Taneycomo from time to time with my kids. There were three brothers from Idaho down there. The very first thing... One of them caught an 18-pound brown last year. I know I'm giving you too much information, but I'm just really getting excited. But, they were doing the same thing. They just wanted to help her.

I thought this is a beautiful picture of exactly what the church is supposed to be. People show up and we're not just here doing our thing. We do this all the time. We're here all the time. We see somebody new and our eyes turn and we're like, "Get over here and let me show you something." That's the church. This is exactly what it's supposed to be.

A few weeks ago, we did a writers and speakers workshop. Margaret Feinberg came in and gave us the writing portion of that. She asked us to define our audience and she wanted us to get very specific. I probably didn't get specific enough, but quickly wrote down these three statements about the folks we are trying to reach at Woodland Hills Family Church.

Here's who we are trying to reach and if this is you, again, I want you to leave here today clearly knowing we care for you, you matter to us, we're doing what we're doing today because of you.

You've given up on the church, but not your faith. You've been through enough bad church experiences. You don't want the church anymore. You say, "Ted, I had a pastor that I listened to for years and years and then he had three affairs. I can't listen to him anymore." "We had another one that just stole money from the church." "I go on television and I see people and I'm questioning their motives. I don't want anything to do with organized religion anymore."

Here's what we are here to tell you. If you've given up on organized religion, you have found the perfect church because we are the most unorganized church in town. We follow the laws and the rules. Other people take care of the money. I want you to know this about me as one of the pastors of this church. Please understand this. I don't count the money. I don't see who gives what. I have no power to sign a check. I see the budget, but I don't oversee it. The elders do that. I'm very hands off with the money. I want you to know what. Because where do pastors get in trouble? It's with women and money. And many of you have given up on the church because of that, but your saying you still have faith. We think about you when we're programming. We think about you with our environments and our experience.

You're worn down by the weight of denominational preferences and want to renew your faith. That one probably jumped out at me first when given this assignment. You were part of a denomination or you were part of a church where the traditions of men became more important than the scripture. The application of the scripture became way more important than the interpretation of it. I hear this all the time at our church. We love Woodland Hills. We know God is doing something here; I just don't want my parents or grandparents to find out about it. I've heard people say, "My grandmother would roll over in her grave if she knew I was here." "Ted, we love it; this is going to be our church home, but when my parents come up, we're going to go to First _____ Church. We can't come here. I'd be in big trouble."

We get that and we understand. This is why we don't allow our church to be run by red tape; it's not a bureaucracy. We don't have committees flowing out everywhere. We want to empower you to be a minister of the gospel and go out into this community and share the good news of Jesus with your family friends and complete and total strangers.

You were raised in a religious home or community, so you know little bits and pieces, but you have never placed faith in Jesus. I want you to know that from the coffee to the casualness to the smoke and lights and the sound and the band and the pastor who untucks his shirt and was an awesome athlete... Please, I want you to hear this. Never mistake our environments or experience for being really soft on the gospel. Our environments and experiences are geared towards making sure you know you matter to us. If you've not placed faith in Jesus, you are lost in your sins. You are headed to an eternal separation from Almighty God, to a literal place, we believe, called hell. We don't want you to ever mistake what's going on here for a "It's everybody gets in; I just have to live a good enough life." No, here's what it is. Jesus, the Righteous One, died for your sins. According to the scriptures, he was buried, he rose again and, according to the scriptures, was seen by many. How does salvation come to you? It comes by faith alone in Christ alone. That's it.

So, please hear this. There is no bait and switch going on today. Some of you don't go to the membership class. You don't go to Starting Point because you're like, "That's where they get you. That's where they get your routing number and checking account number and that's where they keep it on file for eternity and just drip it from your account. That's when they are going to pounce on me."

It will never happen. I leave you with this. We want something for you, not from you. And that's the whole point of what Paul was saying in leveraging his authority. We want to give of our lives to you. We want to share the gospel of Jesus with you and let you know this is the way to have a relationship with God, through his Son Jesus Christ; he's the only way, the truth, and the life. We want you to hear that message clearly, but in doing so, we want to do that by giving you our lives. And all God's people said... Amen

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we thank you for Woodland Hills and what you continue to do here. Father, it is appropriate at this moment to pause and say nothing and allow the one who is wrestling with the church and allow the one who is wrestling with a bad church experience and allow the one who has never placed faith in Jesus to do that right now.

I'm going to remain silent to allow those who do not have a relationship with Jesus to cry out today and, by faith alone in Jesus alone, become followers of Christ.

Father, I trust that many today have put aside this idea that they need to start doing something or stop doing something to find approval from you. I pray that today they would understand clearly and nail it down that it is the work that Jesus completed on our behalf. I pray that today, they have faith alone in that and not in themselves for their salvation. We welcome them to this family. We want something for them, not from them.

We are grateful. Continue to use Woodland Hills in Stoney and Taney Counties and Southwest Missouri and into Northern Arkansas to reach families with the good news that Jesus, the Righteous One, has died for our sins, he was buried, he rose again. And, as we heads towards Easter, I pray that this message will just be pounding in our hearts every day to the point we share it with everyone we come in contact with. That the people we talk to this week will know we care as we share.

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