



Friending
Part 3 – Are We Friendly?
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're ending a series today called *Friending*. We're answering this question: "Are we friendly?" As a church, are we friendly? We're going to deal with this because at the end of the message, we want you to not only be able to answer this question individually, but also corporately as a church family.

About ten years ago, we went through a very difficult time as a church and we lost a lot of folks. It was very painful. Through that process, we brought in someone to do a StratOp, a strategy planning session for our church. If you know me or are close to me at all, you know I'm not a huge fan of long meetings. How many of you love long meetings? No one in 11:00, okay, so all of the 9:00 people... I actually want to have ribbons made that say, "I survived another meeting that could have been taken care of with an email." That's a good ribbon to get. So, I'm not a huge fan of long meetings, but this was a full week, figuring out who are we as a church and where are we going?

The two guys we brought in for it kind of came in as secret shoppers on the Sunday before we started on Monday. They just wanted to see who we were. Monday was about historical insight into the church: who we are, what's in our DNA. When we got to the question: "Are we friendly?" I, with passion, said, "Absolutely!" And the one guy said this and this is an exact quote: "Your church is full of life, but friendly doesn't jump out at me." So, that ended the strategy planning session with him; we fired him right there on the spot. We said, "We're friendly. We only keep people we agree with." I was 32 and fired up and now I'm middle aged and fired up, but this is a question that has to stay before us.

I've been invited to participate with other ministry leaders and organizational leaders in Branson to do something about the problem with the breakdown of the family in Stone and Taney Counties. I love being a part of these meetings. It's been this summer. But, in these meetings, I really struggle because there are those who are church-ed and those who are unchurch-ed. There is a disdain at times in the room for those who would be considered church-ed. It just crawls all over me because even within the two labels... We're not big into labels, but for this morning, let's just go there for teaching purposes.

Within church-ed and unchurch-ed, you actually have more labels under them. You have Christians who are church-ed, you also have non-Christians who are church-ed. They go to church regularly, but they've never placed faith alone in Christ alone.

In the unchurch-ed category, you have Christians and non-Christians. You have Christians who are unchurch-ed. I actually call those dechurch-ed. Something happened to them. Something was said or done or they've tried out all different church-ed and none of them are working for them.

I always like to tell those people, “Where you go, there you are. Maybe it has a little bit to do with you as well.” Then you also have non-Christians who are unchurched.

In this meeting, I’m struggling because I feel like we have to choose, as a church. We are either going after churched or we’re going after unchurched. I’m here to tell you, we don’t. We, as a church family, are called to love one another. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples by the way you love one another, by the way you care for one another.” I believe we should love one another and be the family of God as we reach out to the lost and to the seekers. We don’t have to choose between the two.

We’re going to use the term *seeker* for just a moment to look at four different types of churches, how churches look to those who are part of the family of God, and what we do about it. Then I’ll share with you the heart and DNA of this church. It’s actually been part of my DNA for like 20 years.

Seeker Adverse

This is my term. These are churches – maybe you’ve been to them – where when first time guests show up, they’re not really prepared or you may even get the feeling they don’t want you there, like you’re kind of in the way. As a youth pastor, this wore me out because we would work so hard to get the young people from the community in and then they would come in and the senior adults we be like “Tell them to take their hats off!”

“I’m not telling them to take their hats off. We want them to get to know Jesus. We are not a behavior modification church; I’m not here to clean them up. We let Jesus clean them up.” And all God’s people said... Amen. I’m like, “No, stop it!” That was the seeker adverse: “We don’t like the way he looks, the way he talks, the way he smells.” We’ve got to move past this in encouraging churches and followers of Jesus to realize please don’t allow your political beliefs to be the most important thing about you. Please don’t refuse to associate with someone who doesn’t agree with you on Twitter politically.

Seeker Sensitive

We have a desire at this church... We’re not seeker adverse, but we call ourselves seeker sensitive. It’s very important to understand. You probably get this in my talks. I speak to believers, primarily, but in a way that doesn’t offend seekers unnecessarily. We don’t go to level in the message where... I don’t use seventy-five-dollar words, I don’t get into a lot of Greek and Hebrew. I want to explain the truths of the scripture in a way that someone brand new to our church who never studied the Bible before, can understand it and can get it. We are still speaking to believers, but we’re seeker sensitive. We’re always thinking about what a first-time guest to our church, to our assembly feels or thinks when they gather here, when they come to be a part of what’s happening here on a Sunday.

For example, years ago... I share this a lot and I haven’t shared it recently. I got back to our church from a trip and something happened while I was gone and it just shocked me to the core. I wasn’t prepared for it and I was shocked when it happened. But, it also proves the point that we are not a pastor led church; we’re an elder led church.

For years, we've said around there that we don't have change jars all around our church. We don't have a college fund change jar and then this mission trip is happening, so put your loose change there and then we have loose change collected for this over here, like you see when you go to the checkout line sometimes at grocery stores or restaurants. We say unchurched, non-Christian people already have a view of the church that we're out to get their money. They see the televangelists who have taken advantage of this and they drive the fancy planes. I don't know if you drive a plane. You fly a fancy plane or whatever it is. If you are new to our church, we haven't gotten our plane yet. That's what you need to know. That comes next year. But, it's already in their mind that we only want their money.

We don't want them walking into our church and seeing us nickel-and-dime them on the way in. "Here's where you give your change. We'll take your folded money in there." So, you can imagine. That's always been in my heart to be sensitive to that.

So, when I walked in this spring and I saw this ginormous orange change funnel in our Children's Auditorium, collecting change from children... I saw it and I saw all the kids dropping money in and watching it go around. I was like, "What happened!? How did that get here?" The heart behind it is to teach children how to be cheerful givers. That was the heart behind it, but I'm standing there the first Sunday I saw it, talking to a family visiting from Washington D.C. and the children were so in love with this that as I'm talking to the dad, the kids were coming over and reaching in all of dad's pocket and pulling out all of his money. I said, "Welcome to Woodland Hills; we're here for the dough, baby! We want your cash in large sums." I said, "This is just your change kids; get your dad's wallet when we go in there."

It just hit me. And Stephanie explained it and she said, "Here's why we're doing that. Do you want us to get rid of it?" I said, "No, but we do need to explain it." If you are brand new to our church, we're not here for your nickels and dimes. God doesn't need your money. That's not our heart.

If you're wondering what happened, somebody asked an elder and the elder said yes and we fired him last week, so he's done. No. But, we always have the lens of what those who are far from God are thinking? And do we put up unnecessary barriers to the gospel? Sometimes we do that as a church.

Seeker Oriented

About 16 years ago, I was part of a church and was almost fired over this issue right here. I was a seeker sensitive pastor in a seeker oriented church. A seeker oriented church means that everything you do, every program started, and the message that are given are spoken directly to the seeker. This creates a challenge. It's a big deal because some would say seeker oriented is evangelism and seeker sensitive is discipleship. The church – understanding the gathering, the assembly – is the family of God. When we gather, we are gathering as the family. We'll get into that a little bit more in a second.

Seeker Goofy

You know I labeled this one too. Some churches have gone so far with seeker oriented, I now put them in a new category called seeker goofy. This is making assumptions about lost people that aren't even

true. Churches are going so far out of the way and they are saying, "Just because we can, we should." And it's kind of in your face. I've been to churches where they said, "If you wouldn't mind, don't take a Bible up on stage with you." I kind of put that in seeker goofy because I've never met a seeker who is offended by a pastor holding a Bible. If anything, I think they expect it. They expect us to talk out of this book.

If anything, they don't want my thoughts, words, or opinions; they want this book. It's the reason they come to us for weddings. They're like, "Our lives are so screwed up that we need to do something redeeming." It's the reason they come to us for funerals. They want the Word of God spoken. It's the reason when they start having kids, they come to the church because they're like, "We're going to screw these kids up so bad; we better figure this out." So, I think we've just got to be careful not to assign motives to seekers and thoughts to seekers that they don't even have.

I'll have pastors sometimes tell me, "Here's who is coming to our church." If I've been to their church... I visit some 50 churches a year, so I see all kinds of churches. Some of them that are watching on line now are going, "What category is he putting us in?" I'm just saying sometimes we assume people are here that aren't even here and we have to guard that.

This is an important conversation as we look at what a friendly church is and I'm bringing it to you in three points because I spent yesterday with Baptists in Houston. I had four points, but I had to trim it down. It's only three points; we'll end with a poem and send you on your way.

Friendly churches accept everyone.

And all God's people said... Amen! Jesus is for everyone and that's why this church will always be for everyone. We want everyone coming in here. We want everyone experiencing what's going on at Woodland Hills. If you're here today hung over, welcome to Woodland Hills Family Church. I'm not making a joke about that. I'm telling you we're glad you're here. If you smoked weed before coming in here, welcome to Woodland Hills Family Church; we're glad you're here. If you're here, living with your boyfriend, living with your girlfriend, please hear this is the heart of our church, we're glad you're here. You are accepted here, but now watch where this goes and stick with the whole message.

I had someone come up to me after the first service... I'm not going to share that story. I'm sorry, but I need to guard that. But, I want to share it. It's a good story. It'll be out in about six months. But it was someone who told me... I'll just tell you this, but I can't tell you a lot of it. No! I'm not telling you; I'm going back to this point right here. It was someone who said, "I've been coming on and off for a year and I would not call this church friendly." I wish I could tell you more of the story, but I can't. I dug into it with her. I wanted to know what she meant. It was a lifestyle issue. She was like, "I know what you believe and I don't feel it aligns, but today did make a lot of sense."

So, if you here today thinking *I've never been in a church that has accepted me*, know the difference between we accept everyone wherever you are at right now, but that doesn't mean we want you to stay that way. Jesus is for you. Jesus loves you. But, we love you so much we don't want to see you stay

that way. So, accepting you... Stick with us so you understand what that means by the end of the message.

Jesus spent time with those who were far from him. And when he associated with them, he was accused of being one of them. Here's what the scripture says in Matthew 11: **19 "The Son of Man... Jesus. "...came eating and drinking..."** Welches Grape Juice. This verse tears up some denominations, you know it, but I'm going to say it again. Jesus came eating and drinking, **"and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard..."** Let me tell you, Jesus was sinless. He was the perfect God-Man. He was never a glutton and he was never a drunkard. But, they said, he's **'a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"** He associated with them and so they said he must be one of them. No, Jesus was for everyone.

So, years ago, something came out in the church. It was probably ten years ago and it was because this big idea and I just want to break it down. I'd love for home groups to discuss it and debate it even. It's the big idea here: **People want to belong before they believe.** If you came from a church that was a hardline church on formal church membership, this statement wears you out because you would say, "You cannot belong to our church until you profess faith in Jesus and are baptized. When you believe, then you can belong."

This is a tricky statement. I've wrestled with this statement. I have a lot of dear friends who have taken this statement on as a mission statement for their church. My issue with this statement unexplained is it's confusing for Christians, it's confusing for non-Christians, and it begins to redefine the local church. Here's what I do get. The seeker comes into Woodland Hills Family Church and they want to see if this is a group they can hang with, if this is a group where they can see that their lifestyle reflects what they say they believe. "I want to get in here and sniff them out a little bit. I want to find out what's going on. I want to spend time with them socially." They are okay with that with the word *belong*. And they will belong socially before they say, "I believe and I place faith in Jesus."

Here's where we must be careful. Before you placed faith alone in Christ alone, here's what the scripture says of you. You were conceived in iniquity, you are of your father the devil and a child of darkness. After you place faith in Jesus Christ, you become a child of God and a part of God's family. The reason this can become a very confusing statement if we don't explain it is because we don't want people thinking you can be a child of God, you can be part of the family of God before you believe. That is not biblically or theologically how it works. Biblically and theologically, you place faith alone in Christ alone to become part of the family of God.

If you've been here for a while and you're like, "I feel like I already belong, that's why when we talk about Starting Point and church membership, I get offended because I'm already part of you." We want to remind you; faith alone in Christ alone. Believing in the name of Jesus, confessing Jesus as Lord, and believing that Jesus was raised from the dead, scripture says you are saved and you become a child of God and you become part of the family of God and you belong to the family of God.

When we are talking about family... I want home groups to debate the belong versus believe in that order because if we're talking about it socially and being together and having seekers in the gathering of

believers, great. If we're talking about belong means you are a part of the family of God, that we don't jive with biblically.

In Hebrews 10, we read this and let's talk about this because the word *ecclesia* is the Greek word which means a gathering, a congregation, an assembly. **24 And let us consider how we...** Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, the family of God. **...may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together...** If you grew up in an independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptist church, the King James says this and boy, I heard this message I can't tell you how many times. Verse 25 reads **Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.**

That verse was used on Sunday morning to get people back for Sunday night and Wednesday night services. We'd have 200 on Sunday morning and about 80 in Sunday night and Wednesday night. This verse is not to get Christians to Wednesday night services. That's not the point of this verse. The point of this verse is that you and I would assemble. This is why when I'm in a meeting and the local church is being knocked down by other Christians, I'm going, "But, we can't move away from the fact that we are supposed to assemble. We are supposed to gather. It's that important.

If you don't think assembling is important, I want you to think about Denise Bevins, Cedric Bevins, Savohna Pace who were here on Monday and a few hundred of you gathered around them. You assembled around them to mourn with that family the life of Donald Bevins. We mourn together, we rejoice together, we spur one another on to love and good deeds. **...as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

This is why Paul's passion to the church at Corinth... He said, "I hate to hear that your assembly is destructive. I hate to hear that when you gather, it's not good for the family of God." He says it this way in 1 Corinthians 11, **18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.** This is what the world is to see: us assembling and enjoying the favor of all people, enjoying one another's company.

In James 2, we read about how we do accept everyone and how we have to be careful not to show favoritism in the church. **1 My brothers and sisters...** Again, speaking to believers. **...believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.** And then he gives an example. **2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet..."** Taking on the posture of a servant. **4 ...have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?**

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith... Blessed are the poor. ...and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? And then he reminds them.

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. Accepting everyone.

The idea behind belong and believe I think is as clear as it is to us from scripture. When we get together, there should be so much love oozing out this congregation that people passing by go, "We want to be a part of that." I think the problem today in a lot of churches – and we don't want it to be a problem in this church – is that people walk by and they say, "I've got enough of that at work. I've got enough of that in business meetings." We want them walking by and going, "I see something there. There's something different. I want to be a part of that," and they come and they begin to inquire.

Have you ever been walking through a mall or an airport and you're in the middle of a conversation and all of the sudden you sniff the air and you're like, "Ohhhh, I know what that is. That's Cinnabon. Cinnaboooooon!" Something changes in you. You completely forget everything you were doing and you follow the smell because you just can't handle it. No cinnamon roll on the planet smells like Cinnaboooooon. Even if I don't have time to stop, I walk by and say, "Blessings on you and the children that follow you. May generations that follow you be blessed for what you're providing the human race. Thank you."

That should be the church. People smell it and they see it.... You're like, "You truly accept everyone?" Listen, we love the fact that we smell marijuana in here. We love the fact that you're in here right now and you're struggling with lifestyle issues. We're glad you're here and we want you to know we're not just glad you're here; we want you to be a part of what's happening here when we assemble. And we hope you leave going, "Cinnaboooooon! Man, what they got going on there is so good; we've got to be a part of it."

Friendly churches remove barriers.

Not only do we accept everyone, we go beyond just saying, "Hey, we're glad you're here, welcome." We want to remove barriers. This is kind of the heart of the seeker sensitive. We want to remove unnecessary barriers. We're a non-denominational church. We don't hold to a lot of traditions because we want it to be about Jesus, we want it to be about the gospel. We don't want to get so excited where we're honoring the traditions of men more than the teachings of Jesus. We don't want that, so we remove these barriers.

Many of you are here today... I talked to a lady after the first service. I think I can share this story. She's been looking for a church for some 13 years. She goes, "Everywhere I go, I could never really figure out what it's about, but over the last few months here, I've really figured out what it's about because all you people ever talk about is Jesus." I'm glad that's coming through. We want to remove barriers.

As we talk about the Lord... I love this story. If you want to flip back to the left and go to John 4, it's the story of the woman at the well. We don't have time to get into the whole story today, but I just love this story when we talk about removing barriers because Jesus engaged people in conversation and he associated with them. He would spend time with them. He spent time with the tax collectors and with the sinners.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) So, now he’s engaging this woman in conversation. Here’s why this is such a big deal, this is why it’s a shock moment because she’s like, “Why are you talking to me? Why would you talk to me?”

9 “The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman.” Where did the Samaritans come from? In 722 BC, when the Assyrians defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel and they exiled about half of the population out, they brought those from Babylon and Assyria into it. They intermarried with the Jews and they were considered a mix race. The children of the Jew and Assyrians that were brought in were now the Samaritans and the Judeans looked down upon them. **“How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)**

What we are going to see is Jesus is taking cultural, traditional, and racial barriers and saying “No, I’m engaging you in conversation.”

10 Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink...” The Messiah. **“...you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”**

11 “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep.” It was probably over 100 feet deep. **“Where can you get this living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”**

13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again...” This is important for us to understand as a church. He doesn’t just remove the barriers and accept her and begin having conversations with her, he does what we’re going to get to in the last point. He’s going to teach her, he’s going to share with her, He’s going to tell her what living water is.

I think this is the sad part today for churches. To me, they spend so much time wanting to receive the lost and the seeker into the congregation, but they never tell them the next step. They never go the extra bit, but Jesus doesn’t hold back. He says, **14 “...but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”**

15 The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Have you been in an uncomfortable situation. I’m looking out at a primarily Caucasian congregation right now. How comfortable are you walking up and engaging someone wearing a “black lives matter” shirt? How comfortable are you there? I think that’s where Jesus would walk right up to that person and begin having a conversation. Black lives matter, blue lives matter, white lives matter, all these conversations we’re having, but I’m wondering, follower of Jesus, if your politics are standing in the way of your faith. You’re so worked up about things that you forget that we are called into uncomfortable

conversations and we're supposed to be leaning in as Jesus leaned in. We're supposed to be taking on not just his message, but his life.

We've been doing family camp at Kanakuk Family Kamp for over ten years. Years and years ago, I was sitting in the back. It was the first night and they were starting the programming. It's a Christian camp and the counselors were passionate college students, full of zeal and they got a chant going. We don't do a lot of chants at Woodland Hills Family Church because it just doesn't work.

I was sitting back there near a guy who I could tell just didn't want to be there. He was probably ten years older than me. I could tell he was uncomfortable. Everything about his posture said, "I am closed. I don't want to be here."

They started this chant: "I love Jesus, yes I do. I love Jesus, how about you?" The guy was like *Where is the door? Get me out of here. I am running. Honey, I told you this was a cult. I knew it as soon as we drove through the gates and all the vines and walls that were built. I told you when it gets dark, the costumes come out. We've got to get out of here.* I could just see it all over him.

This chant started. I'm uncomfortable with chants and camping for me... I've always struggled with it... Anyway... We'll just move on.

The next day at The Bean, which is the coffee shop, I was looking for him because I could just tell he was a fish out of water. I sit down in the booth with him and I go, "Hey, I'm Ted." He introduced himself. We'll call him Jason. Jason shakes my hand and I go, "Jason, I've just got to ask. What are you doing here?"

He doesn't bat an eye when he says, "My wife caught me at a weak moment."

I said, "Tell me about it."

He runs a company in a city far from here and he said, "I was losing it all. I was losing my wife, losing my family. I was a mess because I'm an alcoholic. She said, 'You go to rehab and if you don't go to rehab, we're done.'" So, he checked into a 28-day program. If you've been through rehab, you know at some point when your family starts visiting... His wife showed up with a list of things that were going to change. She said, "You want to keep me, you want to keep this family, here's how you're going to toe the line, pal."

On that list was "Attend Kanakuk Family Kamp." And he checked every one on the list and there he sat.

I said, "It's not obvious that you're uncomfortable..." I became friends with him that week because, again, I just want... As uncomfortable as it can be, we're really good at getting into our home groups and getting into our Christian circles and learning a language and being comfortable hanging with people that we agree with, but can I just encourage you to get outside your comfort zone. Go have a conversation with someone that is shocked that you'd even be talking to them.

Later that year, Jason invited me out. I was in his town speaking and he invited me to a restaurant. I get there... He had his own company and they take me back to this back room in this Italian restaurant with this big circle booth and I'm like, *Oh, the company is the Mob! I'm going to get wacked!* Now I'm on his turf. I'm super uncomfortable. We sit down and he's got the menu open. The whole staff of the restaurant comes out to greet him. I'm like, *He owns the restaurant! This is where he buries the people! They're buried in the basement!* The chef comes out talking to him and I'm thinking, *You better get this order right or you'll get wacked.* But, we developed a friendship kind of like the odd couple. It was like this really shouldn't work...

I get pretty comfortable... I am a Caucasian Midwesterner that when I visit other cities and towns, it's time to get outside of my comfort zone and have a conversation with someone who doesn't look like me, doesn't talk like me, doesn't understand life like me. I think this was modeled to us in our savior and would be true of our gathering. May we just guard our hearts from becoming a place where we're just loving and kind and accepting of people that look like us and talk like us and walk like us. We want to be friendly, accepting everyone and removing every possible unnecessary barrier to that.

A friendly church prioritizes salvation.

It's not just about accepting and removing barriers; a friendly church prioritizes salvation. Have you ever been on an airplane... I love when the pilot comes out with that passive aggressive announcement. He says, "The crew is here primarily for your safety." He's giving that to you before you give the flight attendants a hard time. They really weren't hired to give you half a glass of Diet Coke. That's not their priority. Their priority is to teach you how to brace for impact. Their priority is to show you how to get the door open. Their priority is to show you how to get the raft out of the plane. I still crack up at that. If a plane goes down... I can't inflate a raft on dry land in a good situation and I'm going to do it in a narrow cab this big and get it out of the plane? So, when they ask if you are willing and able to assist, I'm like, "Yeah, they can follow my butt off this plane. I'm getting off of here as soon as possible." But, they give you that announcement because what are they saying? Your safety is of utmost importance.

This is now my new parenting motto. I tell my kids all the time, "I am here for your safety, not your comfort because I'm your dad and I love you." The big one right now with the kids in the car is they want to be comfortable when we're on long trips in the car. You'll look back in the seat... I don't know if you have a minivan, but in a minivan, when the seats recline, they'll have the waist strap up around their chest somewhere and they'll have the shoulder part going right across their face. I wake them up.

We were driving through Kansas and you know it's about a 37-hour drive from one end of Kansas to the other. It's a long drive through Kansas. I look over at Corynn and she's slouched down in the seat and she has the seatbelt across her face. I wake her up to put the seatbelt on right.

She's like, "Why are you waking me up?"

I go, "Oh, because I was sitting her thinking of ways I could make you uncomfortable." Which is what parents do at night after the kids go to bed. They sit up, wring their hands, and think about how they can make their kids' lives miserable tomorrow. "Let's just give them things to be rude and mean."

“No. I’m here primarily for your safety. And I’ve already told you this. In Kansas, there are no people, only wildlife. Driving down the road at 75 miles per hour, a deer can hop up out of this ditch at any moment and you’ll lose half your face. I need you to sit up, put the seatbelt on right. I’m here for your safety more than your comfort.”

Can I just tell you as a church? Please hear that. If you’re here for the very first time... “So, Ted, I’m living with my boyfriend.” “Ted, I’m part of the LGBT community.” “Ted, I like to smoke weed.” “Ted, I’ll probably give people the finger in the parking lot.” We don’t allow our elders to do that anymore, so we are also going to be changing you on that, too.

Can I share with you a verse we shared several weeks ago? “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.” When we speak truth to you, it’s because we love you, because we care about you. Remember when we made this quote? “A friend accepts you for who you are, but loves you too much to see you stay that way.” That’s true of you. That’s the heart of this church for you. We want you to know that about us. We want you to know without Jesus, you will die and spend eternity in hell.

But, we love you too much. We want to tell you how to avoid that. We want to tell you about the one who changes your life, changes your direction, changes your path, changes your journey, changes where you will spend eternity. We love you and accept you and remove barriers for that point. We want you to understand the message of the gospel. You’re like, “Well, I love all coffee.” We just want you to be caffeinated while we tell you all this. Sit in nice chairs, be comfortable, but we’re here to proclaim to you. We’re here primarily for your safety more than your comfort. We want you to know that Jesus is Lord and if you will confess that with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus has been raised from the dead, you will be saved. That’s the priority of this church. We’re not just accepting people and loving people and caring for people for no purpose. The purpose is that you would know the one who died for your sins, that you would confess that he is Lord and believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we thank you for a church that accepts everyone, removes barriers, but prioritizes salvation. With heads bowed right now and eyes closed, I’m just going to ask that if you’ve never placed faith in Jesus, but today you say, “Okay, I’ll get it.” Someone struggled with this earlier saying, “It just sounds like you have a conditional acceptance here at this church that you accept me so long as...” No, we accept you right where you are, but we love you too much to see you stay there. It’s not a conditional acceptance; it’s pointing out your need for a savior.

If you’ve never confessed Jesus as Lord and you’ve never placed faith alone in Christ alone, I pray that this moment would be that time for you and I’m just going to invite you to pray in your own words. Father, I come to you a sinner, knowing that I am of my father the devil and a child of darkness. I repent of my sin, I change my mind about what I believe about me and what I believe about you. I’m not longer the source of my salvation; I am trusting in the name of Jesus, the name above all names. He is Lord and he died for me and today I trust him as my savior.

We believe if you confessed that and you believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead, the same power that raised him from the dead is the same power that saves your soul. So, today, you are saved.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus, through the authority of the name of Jesus, and the power in the blood of Jesus that we pray and everyone agreed and said... Amen.