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## Family Meeting

### Part 2 – Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone

Pastor Ted Cunningham

I just want to say how encouraged I was over the last week to watch you minister so well to one another and to this community. It was overwhelming, and that's not just pastor talk or preacher speak; that comes from the heart of someone who loves this community deeply and just watched all of you not even think about it, but jump into ministry over the last ten days after the tragedy on Table Rock. I want to say thank you for that. Many of you did that without even thinking. Many of you needed permission to do that and last Sunday was permission for many of you to help those in our community and outside of our community. Family members and friends mourned with those who lost family and friends.

Today, we're talking about *Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone*. You're looking at one guy who loves being comfortable. If you love being comfortable, would you raise your hand. That's everybody. We all love it! I have a recliner that is 11 years old. It didn't get comfortable until about three years ago, if you know what I'm talking about. I love tennis shoes that are over a year old. I don't like brand new tennis shoes because they're just not as comfortable. I enjoy the comforts of life.

Today, I have this question to ask you as we start off. **When was the last time you did something outside of your comfort zone because you knew it would be good for you?** When was the last time you did something that was uncomfortable, but you did it going into it knowing "I need to do this; this is going to stretch me, this is going to make me do something that I'm not all that comfortable with"?

On the way in this morning, Amy and I were talking about when the last time was for us. But then just looking over the course of our 22 years of marriage and even before we met and all throughout our life. When did we take steps outside of the comfort zone because we both agree and if you believe this, you can say amen, we typically don't grow in the comfort zone. We grow outside of comfort zones. We grow when we're stretched.

**Physically.** For example, those who heard Travis' message a few weeks ago. It's his passion to help people get healthier. It's the same thing with Dr. Hill. Sometimes we get comfortable and we get into routines that actually cause our health to deteriorate. I have this problem with my posture. I have a certain way that I sit. That's why I go to the chiropractor every other week. I need it. I need to get healthy. I need to make decisions to break out of these habits that I've formed that just make me comfortable but aren't good for me physically.

The point of getting healthy physically isn't for your ego; it's not so you can post selfies in the mirror. If I see any more of them from this church, I will start posting shirtless selfies online. And this dad bod is

going to go public just to make you all cringe. But, that's not why we do it. We do it so we can minister to other people. Maybe it's time for you to step outside of your comfort zone physically.

**Vocationally.** Maybe you've been on the same job or you've done the same thing for 20 to 30 years and you find yourself in a comfort zone. You go in with this mentality: *They owe me for everything I've done.* And the quality of your work today isn't as good as it was when you were trying to prove yourself and get better.

Getting out of your comfort zone may mean you need to start reading books in your field or something new. Go to a class, get another degree, get outside of your comfort zone. All of us, when we hit our 40s and 50s, we kind of get into this groove and we're just going to ride it out until retirement. Not good for us.

About two years ago, I got way outside of my comfort zone when I refused to take on... I'm Pastor Ted from Branson, Missouri. That's how I get introduced places. Then someone introduced me as a comedian. I said, "Oh, I don't want that," because it comes with a lot of pressure because you have to deliver like three to five laughs a minute. I like to run back to content when people aren't laughing or it's a bad crowd. They said, "No, you've got to take it." So, I told Amy, "I'm just not comfortable." My wheelhouse is speaking to couples in churches, my passion is marriage.

Two years ago, I decided I would actually go for the sole purpose of doing comedy. TBN asked four of us to come out and film. Here I am, I've been a comedian for like 48 hours and I'm among professionals: Paul Harris, Steven Geyer, Jason Earls. We show up to TBN Studios and they tell us we're not going to have a studio audience. I was like, "What!?! There's going to be nobody to laugh?"

I called someone in California. Paula McCloud, thank you very much. She brought her small group, so we had a studio audience of six that showed up for this taping. Paul Harris was like, "That's a Branson crowd if ever I've seen a Branson crowd." Paul obviously was the best; he just killed it. I called Amy for comfort before I taped this 20 minute comedy special. She goes, "That's what I've always appreciated about you, Ted. You're willing to take big risks and get outside of your comfort zone." No, I was really hoping to hear, "You've got this. you're going to do okay." Really, deep down, she's going, "I don't know? You may not be able to do this. I guess we'll find out."

We were just in Knoxville. I still do conferences and retreats, but I've been doing the Date Night Comedy thing. Amy and I were walking... We had just finished this wonderful dinner and we were walking back to our hotel, which was almost a mile away. We walked by this club. I looked through the window and there was lady with her back to the window, about ten feet off the window, on stage. There were about 30 people sitting around a table like this and their expression were like they were kind of bored. Every now and then you'd see a polite laugh and then they'd go back to resting their head in their hand. I look on the sign and it says, "Open Mic Stand Up Comedy."

Amy goes, "You should totally do it!"

I said, "Not on your life! Look in there at these people!" They were lethargic. I mean not one person was laughing or moving.

Amy says, "It'll be hysterical!"

I said "Yeah, for you."

There's nothing funnier than to watch somebody bomb on stage. Can I get an amen on that? It's evil of us, but when... Admit it. All the show people in here, when you go watch somebody else's show and something goes wrong, you get more joy out of that than you do the practiced lines. But, stretching myself...

There are so many easy yeses. And then sometimes I need to say yes to go do something that is just not comfortable because I've learned that failure makes us better. Bombing ain't bad for you. If you watch comedians... You know Jerry Seinfeld says, "If you're not ready for brutality mentality, you can't be in this business." You've got to stretch yourself and prove yourself. Some of us get into jobs and get into a rhythm and we're just going with the flow, but maybe you need to break out of what you've been doing.

In Branson, I know there's this big debate on whether the Chamber should be supporting the outdoor activities or the shows. Why can't we do both. I think we... This is what made Branson great, but what if this is the next step to make Branson great? Why can't we do both? Instead of "I gotta get my little piece of the pie," why can't we all work to make the pie bigger? I think that's where... Some of us have been like, "No we've done the shows this way for 30 years and it's how we're always going to do them." Listen, if as an entrepreneur, you start a business and your idea is "This is how I've always done it," and you don't think about your changing customer base, you will eventually go out of business. As a business owner, you know this. You have to be thinking through the mind of your clients and of your customers.

**Parentally.** Isn't it the job of a parent to constantly be pushing kids outside of their comfort zone, getting them to do stuff they don't want to do? The reason we don't see 18-year-olds on bicycles with training wheels is because at some point, Mom and Dad took the training wheels off.

We had one kid that was ready for it and one that said, "Nooo!" "I'm going to get behind you and you know you can do this and you're 12." No, I'm kidding. But you've got to get rid of them. "I know that's easy and you like to stop and not have to put your feet down, but you're going to have to learn some new things."

You probably taught them how to swim this way. You got them to study. They didn't want to study. They don't want to go to school in a couple of weeks, but as parents, we don't ask them if they want to go to school, we send them places outside their comfort zone. The goal of the parent is to make sure the home isn't too comfortable, and all God's people said... amen. We don't want them sticking around. Some of us have made our homes too comfortable and the kids are wanting to stay forever. We just dropped off two at camp for two weeks.

**Spiritually.** Today, we're talking spiritually. If you have your Bibles, turn to 2 Corinthians 1. I know this. My faith is not growing if I'm constantly going before the Lord, asking him to keep me from trials, to keep me from troubles, to keep me from difficult times. I know I grow in my faith during difficult times. I haven't felt what I felt last week in our town... I haven't felt that in a church or community since 9/11. This is just me personally, just what I was experiencing in talking to people and spending time with people. I watched our community, through terrible tragedy, show up, grow, be stretched. I know that when I get in my comfort zone and just do the punching the clock thing... I've got to be stretched even in my faith because in faith, we grow through these difficult times.

That's exactly what Paul is going to talk about to the Church in Corinth. To understand the context, I think that as parents, we're going to understand the context of trying to do ministry in Corinth at this time. This city was in a state of just immorality, debauchery, vulgarity, and as parents, we know, as we're trying to raise our children in the ways of the Lord, culture is pulling them. It's like every day we get up we know they are going to be pulled in this direction, but we want to keep them grounded, we want to keep them centered. It's why we do family meetings.

Paul plants this church in Corinth and his letter back to them is "We've got to stay centered." You read this through a lot of Paul's letters. "Don't forget the Gospel of Jesus." The thrust of this letter is "How do we deal with the pain he's dealing with, with a church that is starting to conform to the culture around it?" When you read the tone and the text, you get that he is like, "Let's stay grounded in the Gospel of Jesus." He's going to explain the troubles that he's been through, the hardships that he's been through, and what to do when you face those.

**3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles...** We're going to stop right there. There are three descriptions we get. God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort. We're going to see what comfort in Christ looks like today. It is an infinite, overflowing wellspring. It's the core message of the Christian faith. It's what many of us have been singing in church our whole lives. "Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so." This core message is when we go through troubles, we lean into the Father of compassion

Yesterday was a fun day for me as a dad as we were packing up the kids, knowing they are going to be gone for two weeks. They didn't get clingy, but they got closer. They were coming around, giving more hugs. I say they, but my daughter was coming around giving more hugs, asking how I was and what was going on. I could just tell that thinking about the unknown of what time away from parents looks like for two weeks. She's leaning into her father.

The core message of this text is when you and I experience... Here are all the descriptions we see from the word *troubles*, and they are used over nine times in this book. Troubles also means pressures and distresses is what he's saying. The pressures from the world pulling us away and now the pain of actually seeing some of the followers of Jesus going that way; this is causing great distress on Paul. The hardships that he has dealt with... You're talking about imprisonment and beatings and the harassment.

If you have made a decision to follow Jesus, memorize this list. You will have troubles. You will have pressures. You will have distresses. There will be hardships. You'll be harassed. But, the goal here and the thrust of the whole letter is that you and I lean into our heavenly Father, the God of all comfort and compassion. Here's the thrust of it:

**Troubles takes us out of our comfort zones and comfort zones defined would be external and temporal, and into the comfort of Christ, which is internal – what's going on inside of us – and eternal.** Some of us, when faced with troubles and trials and difficult times, immediately think, *Okay, this is going to pass; I should just get it over with as quickly as possible. It's what's going on out there, but I just have to get away from this.* That's our first reaction, when our first reaction should be leaning into the comfort of Christ, leaning into "Jesus loves me, this I know; for the Bible tells me so." It is an unlimited, infinite, overflowing supply available to us at all times. That's where we lean in. Now watch. I'm going to go back and read the passage again and then pick up what we do once we're comforted in Christ.

**3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so...** Once we've been comforted, what do we do with it? ***...that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*** We are the conduit, we are a channel; it comes through us, we receive it, not just to become spiritual glutens, but to use it and to give it away.

I heard a pastor this week say... People in his church were crying out for deeper Bible teaching and he said, "Just don't be confused in thinking... If you've been going to Bible study after Bible study and doing nothing with it, you're a spiritual Bible study glutton. You need to do something with it. You need to practice it. You need to get outside and do something with, not just gather up a bunch of head knowledge."

**5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ...** Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." ***...so also our comfort abounds through Christ.*** Yes, we take up our cross and we are comforted as we lean into our heavenly Father. **6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation...** not your justification, but the continuing of your growing in the faith – sanctification. ***...if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.*** **7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.**

**The comfort of Christ is not for you to live a comfortable life, it is for you to serve others through their hardships.** The comfort of Christ, bottom line, is not for you to live a comfortable life. The self-help books or preachers or teachers that you would read or hear that it's always about you... At this church, you know it's not always about you. It's not always about me. It can start with you, but let it go through you, let it flow from you. It's not just so you can live a happier, healthier, wealthier life, it's so you can do something with it in serving other people.

Let me ask the question I asked to start the message, changing only one word. When was the last time you did something outside of your comfort zone because you knew it would be good for others? When was the last time you served?

The Lord's timing is perfect. This message was prepared by two Thursday nights ago and then changed after the tragedy. As I'm looking back over the notes in light of what happened and in light of how this town has responded to it and in light of how you the church has responded to it. I see that God knew the message that needed to be given.

If you've been around for any period of time, you know this isn't how I often talk. I don't deal a lot in mysticism. I pretty much stick with the scripture and practicals. But, when it is obvious that God is clearly moving and speaking, we are to clearly communicate that. What have you done that's been good for others? There are times that I have to get outside of my comfort zone. We have this thing in the church that we like to lean back on when asked to do something that's outside of our comfort zone. We'll say, "Well, that's not my gift" or "That's not my calling." But it is your Christian service.

I'm not gifted in evangelism, but yet evangelism is my Christian service. There are guys and women around here who evangelism flows out of them. Plenty of times I've been with Joe White when... I mean in your face compassionate and bold evangelism... Within seconds, he gets into it. I saw him walk right up to somebody in an airport and share the gospel with a Fox News anchor. I know you think all Fox News anchors are Christians and you're like, "This story would be more believable if it was a CNN anchor," but we believe Fox News anchors and CNN anchors need the Lord and all God's people said... amen.

He walks right up to him and starts sharing the gospel. My immediate response was to hide and watch from a distance. That's terrible. I can just imagine Joe, "And that's my pastor back there behind the pillar. Ted, you can come out; I'm just telling him about the Lord." So, I'm telling you it's not my spiritual gift and I don't get invited to churches to do evangelistic crusades. When I do get invited, it just prompts me to go, "I can share Jesus, but I'd rather do your date night because there are other people way more equipped and way more called, and the Lord has them in the church for this purpose. Use them."

But, I don't get to take that attitude when I meet someone on the street that needs the Lord. I can't be like "Okay, let me get someone who can talk to you." No, I'm going to go outside of my comfort zone. I can't think of a more outside my comfort zone moment. As a pastor of over 20 years, sharing Jesus boldly with a perfect stranger is still way outside my comfort zone, but I do it because it's my Christian service and they need to hear it.

There are times I get engaged in a conversation and just flows easily because this person is ready, but what about the person that's not ready. So, there are comfort zones even within that. "This person is asking for it; this is the perfect opportunity." "This person doesn't want it, so I'm sure they don't want to hear anything about it." No. Share.

We have a core value. We're going cover a core value at our church this week and another one next week. Here's the core value we're covering today out of this. **We believe that Woodland Hills Family Church every member is a minister.**

I get that in 1 Peter 2. **4 As you come to him, the living Stone...** Jesus is the corner stone of the church. We sing about this at this church. **—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—** **5 you also, follower of Jesus, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood...** So, we believe in the priesthood of the believer. If you are follower of Jesus, you are called to be a minister. Some of you come from maybe more mainstream denominations where there was one guy or two or three or four, male or female, they were the ones you went to and called minister. Here, we believe if you claim the name of Christ, according to the scripture, you are part of the priesthood of the saints and you are called to be a minister. That means that when you go through difficult times, when you are challenged, and you have troubles, you're hard-pressed, harassed, dealing with internal pressures, what do you do? Here's what this means playing out a little bit more.

**You don't need THE pastor, you need A minister.** You did this last week and you've done this for the last ten days in this town and it has been beautiful. So, what do you do when you've experienced the comfort of Christ and you've been growing in your faith and you meet someone who needs to be comforted, someone who is going through a difficult time? To kind of say it in a different way, you don't need to go find the pastor, because he's probably on Table Rock, you need to be a minister. When people call the church and say, "I just passed someone in need, what can we do as a church?" The church was already there. It was in you. You had the freedom right there in that moment to be a minister of the gospel of Jesus and meet the need. Reach the person. Spend time. Be part of the priesthood of the saints. Don't think you're not qualified or be afraid you won't know what to say.

I take you to ten days ago when, at City Hall, there were gathered survivors and then the family members of those not yet found. It was probably around 10:00 at night and then as we approached midnight, there were still reports coming in and there the families sat. Our city officials, our first responders... I'll say it again, I know I said it last week. I could not be more proud of how well they responded to that and not just doing their jobs in saving people, rescuing people, but they were compassionate and caring. You could see it. It was all over everyone in the room.

When the City Manager walked in to give a report, on the second row on the righthand side, she had not been given official word yet. She didn't know, but it was a couple of hours after the accident, and there sat the Duck driver's wife. I could tell the moment I looked at her that she was a charismatic believer, on fire for the Lord. When the City Manger made this compassionate update, I just looked down at her. Again, no words spoken. I just looked down at her and she had her head down and as the announcement was being made, she just lifted up her hand toward the Lord. That was ministering to me.

Here is one... You can't get in more of a tragedy than she was in and in the middle of that, was a woman... I just sat there. I already had this message prepared, so this passage is going through my mind and my immediate thought was there's a woman who understands the comfort of Christ and she's leaning into it right now. There were probably 20 pastors around the room and I wanted to make sure they all didn't say anything. I didn't want to ruin the moment. She was leaning into the comfort of Christ. No one said anything because we were all being ministered to by her and her testimony before the Lord. She's a minister. You're a minister. God's called you to encourage people, to comfort people, to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

If I can just tell you, yes that was a tragedy ten days ago and we're still reeling from that in our community, but I want you to know every single week at this church, every week without exception, people are walking through those doors having experienced some sort of tragedy in their life. Whether that be a divorce, whether that be a child who was killed in automobile accident, whether that be a child that took their own life. You wonder how I can say that? It's because we minister to those people all the time. They are here right now. They are dealing with suffering and hardship in their life. May we never be a church where there are like five people that can comfort that person.

Last week, we had almost 2,100 people here. We can now say we're a church of thousands that can meet the needs and minister to those who are struggling and having hardship in this community. I'm here to tell you it's time. I say this boldly as your pastor. It's time we step out of our comfort zones and start comforting others. Some of you have been coming here for a long time to be comforted in your own walk with the Lord and you hear me say it week after week. Can I just encourage you? It's time to step up and step out of your comfort zone. Let the Holy Spirit call you by name right now to find a way to minister, to find a way to serve.

We have something we do every year around here called the Sweet Spot. Today, some of you've already had it coming in, but you're going to be leaving here in a second and there's ice cream set up out there still. How many of you have already had it? Okay, no double scoops. No, I'm just kidding. If you'll sign up for a ministry today, we'll give you that and six steak knives. Do you see what I just did right there? I'm going to hear from about ten of you. You did it again. "The Lord took us into a moment and you felt like you needed to bail us out from what the Lord was doing."

Step up and step out of your comfort zone. You've been comforted... Some of you have been in here like me and my 11 years old recliner; you've been here for 11 years and you have reclined and you are comfy cozy. I just want to challenge you. If you're heart last week was we've got to do something, we've got to serve, we've got to help folks, what are the needs? What can we do? And you were coming up to me left and right with I've got this and I've got that, I can offer this, I'd like to make a donation. Don't let just this period of time be your only opportunity to minister because there is tragedy, trouble, and heartache all around you. Serve. When you go out, you're going to find places to serve.

Get a scoop of ice cream, look at the opportunities, and sign the card. Please, I'm asking you. This isn't just so we... We're not into warm bodies around here. If you're not passionate about something and you're not going to get into it for the purpose of serving, we don't just need to fill slots. What we are looking for... I already joked a little bit about Lea Ann Holsteen holding the baby and taking a nap, but she doesn't want me sharing this, but here we go. I heard this story last week. I can't even tell you how long the Holsteens have been coming here. They will probably tell me after the service. They've been coming here a long time. I just heard this story last week. She always on the schedule to serve in Critter Street, but she brings her tee-shirt for Critter Street every week in case someone doesn't show up. That's someone who gets it.

If you've ever shown up to a Critter Street classroom or Crew or any of our student ministries or WildWoods and you've walked in and seen the panicked looked on someone's face, it may be because

they're now doing something for someone who didn't show up last minute. Step up and show up. Serve people. Minister to the people. They are all gathering here each week. I can't encourage you enough to be a part of what God is doing here.

And then a big change is coming September 9<sup>th</sup>; we're going to three services. Some of you are like, "No! You promised us you never would." I'm with you. I fought this for a long time, but I'm fully in now. I couldn't be more into this. Some of you see this and you're like, "Well can we talk about it?" No. Because I think we looked at it last Sunday. Service times really start to go down, they pale in comparison to what lessons we were learning last week. Don't run from that.

What we're asking... We ask the 9:00 service to attend the 8:30 and we're asking the 11:00 to attend the 11:30. Last week, it was standing room only in this service. We probably had about 30 people that couldn't find seats in here. Just to encourage you, if you would attend the 11:30, please park in Express Parking. We're changing the name from Fast Pass to Express Parking. It's one more minute longer of a walk from Express Parking than it is from the back side of this parking lot. We feel this is going to be very congested. We're trying to ease that up as much as we can for you. If you're dropping kids off at the Cabin, you'll notice it's even a shorter walk. We want to encourage you to use express parking. A couple hundred cars a service are already over there and we would like several hundred cars a service to park over there to ease this up. You notice the margin between services is a little tight. We want to encourage you. Please, if you would, take the 11:30. What we don't want to see happen is to start these three services and the 10:00 is automatically at 100% capacity. Our 9:00 and 11:00 right now are over 90% capacity, so we're hoping to evenly distribute this.

Another very important announcement to make. For cost savings and all of that, we're not going to livestreaming all three services. We will only be livestreaming the 10:00 for the people who are on vacation or stayed home because it rained. I wasn't here when I got the reports and I get them every Monday morning. I read on the report that one Sunday... It did rain that Sunday morning. It wasn't even blowing, it was just kind of a light rain, but when I looked at the report, I laughed out loud when I saw 350 down in attendance. I thought *350 people stayed home or didn't show up because of the rain?* I remember my very first thought was *I know Lord you said take up my cross and follow you, but certainly you didn't mean going to church in the rain.* So, here's what we're asking you to do. **Take up your cross and grab an umbrella.**

If you commit to a ministry... Here's the hard part for me. After the first service, we had a big stack of people committing to serve, but after we do follow up this week, my fear is it will be much smaller. "I got caught up in the moment and you guys put those sprinkles on the cone and got me all excited, so I signed up." Man, if you commit, step out and show up. Be a part of what God is doing here.

Again, I'll say the word, I don't want to overuse the word, but I was overwhelmed because of how well you've been doing this over the last ten days. The Lord is using this church. He's using you. You have a responsibility and a role to play as a minister of the gospel of Jesus. If you have been comforted in Christ from your Father in heaven, the God of all compassion, we're asking that you take that and don't just sit on it and live a comfortable life, but stretch out and step out and serve.

People say we've got these comfortable seats, we all dress casual, and there's no pretense when you show up. Yeah, we want you to give your life. We say we want you to be comfortable and caffeinated during the death process, but we want you to come and die to yourself and go serve.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that I thank you for this church and this community and what you've called us to. Grateful for how you continue to use Woodland Hills. Even now again, we pray for the families who lost family in the tragedy ten days. Would you continue to use us who have been comforted through you to comfort them. Give us ways we haven't even thought of yet to comfort them and to encourage them and to build them up.

We're grateful for what you continue to do in our church and our community. I'm praying for many today that the Holy Spirit is calling them by name to step outside of their comfort zone and step into the comfort of Christ. And as they've been comforted, they would go and comfort others.

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

One more thing I forgot to say, and I forgot to say it in the first service as well. I think one of the things I'm most excited about with the 8:30, 10:00, and 11:30 services is we all get to gather together again. We're bringing the Castle and Chapel back together under one roof here at the Castle, so we will be all gathering here in this room at 8:30, 10:00, and 11:30, starting on September 9<sup>th</sup>.