



Country Roads

Part 5 – Bless the Broken Road (Hope for the Blended Family)

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Next week, we start *Christmas Notes*, a five-part series for Christmas. We have five Sundays in December. We hope you plan on making Woodland Hills a part of your Christmas. Today, our message is *Bless the Broken Road*, but we're talking specifically today to the blended families. We have not done a full and complete message to the blended families in our history at Woodland Hills in over 16 years. We're going to fix that today. I know that part of our ministry to families in the community means we need to do a better job as a church ministering to blended families.

Today is kind of an introduction to that, a kick-off to that. I've been so encouraged by the stories I've been hearing from our congregation. Just letting people know we're going to be talking about this, many of you shared your stories with us and for that, we are grateful and will be sharing many of those today.

There's this term that country music knows. If you've ever had a broken heart... I've had a broken heart. My first broken heart was when I was five and it was Sunshine Borowski in kindergarten. She dropped me for... I don't even remember the kid's name. Country music knows something about brokenness, knows something about broken hearts.

When we talk about the family, we have this term that we often use: **Broken Home**. If you come from a broken home or you use that term, you know that your family of origin has left you cautious. You were very cautious moving into another relationship. We want to remind you that **your family of origin does not define you. It influences you, but it does not define you.** Sometimes our caution, if we come from brokenness, can lead quickly to just being closed altogether.

As we study the blended family this week, I encourage home groups to really dive into this as well. I've been studying it this week and my favorite author, my favorite leader, expert in this area is Ron Deal. He runs a ministry called Smart Step Family out of Family Life in Little Rock, Arkansas. I'd encourage you, if you have a blended family, to write that name down for further resources.

As we jump into this, I want to start with something Ron Deal said that hit me this week. "God's design for the home is perfect. The homes of God's people, however, have never been – nor do I suspect ever will be – perfect."

We know this because when we think about stepfamilies, not only has music been written, but we've seen plenty of movies. How about this famous step mother? [picture of the Wicked Stepmother from Cinderella] Some of you shared with me this week, "I have committed my life to not being like the woman who raised me." If you've ever been to a character dinner at Disney, you know there is someone who walks around as the Wicked Stepmother. I avoid her like the plague. I want nothing to do with her. She's scary on cartoon and she's scary in real life.

If you're open to a little signing, I thought we would sing a song that brings us all together. I know it's a song that most of you remember. Some of you won't know a word of it. Let the old people lead you in it. It goes like this.

"Here's the story of a lovely lady who was bringing up three very lovely girls. All of them had hair of gold, like their mother. The youngest one in curls."

"It's the story of a man named Brady, who was busy with three boys of his own. They were four men living all together, but they were all alone."

"Till the one day when the lady met this fellow, and they knew it was much more than a hunch, that this group must somehow form a family. That's the way we all became the Brady Bunch."

"The Brady Bunch, the Brady Bunch, that's the way we became the Brady Bunch."

We grew up watching this show and so we saw the bumps and the bruises along the way. Today, as we've been praying through this week and, honestly, being nervous to deliver a talk to the blended family myself, I've just prayed. I said, "Lord, just make this talk encouraging and helpful." That's all the goal I have, that you would leave here today, blended family, encouraged with some handles of what you can do to move forward in your relationship.

Here's the tough part, Ron Deal addresses it this way. *"Ministry to the divorced and/or remarried walks the delicate line of truth and grace and..."* I feel that we, as a pro-marriage church and family, we've talked a lot about divorce, valid divorce and invalid divorce. Today, as we talk about this, please understand it *"...is often theologically challenging and pastorally messy."* This church is okay with that. We have the truth, we have God's Word, we know that there is grace for the family... and I'm not saying for some families, for all families, and you can walk in it. But blending a family is challenging. We have to understand that.

We sometimes get in our mind that here's how you blend a family: You have a wedding. That's all you need is a wedding. And once you have a wedding, the family is blended. And the Hebrew for that is "HAH!" That's not at all how a family blends. You don't walk down an aisle with two different people with kids on this side and kids on the other side like the Brady Bunch, and say, "I do" and then all the sudden we're blended. It doesn't work like that. Actually, Kevin Leman says it this way, "You can't blend a family, you can only collide one."

We want to start clearly today with this understanding. To the blended families in our congregation and the blended families in our community, hear this clearly from this church, you are a family, and all God's people said... Amen. You are a family. It means you look different, but what family doesn't? We all look different. You have to adjust your expectations going into this. I think that's one of the biggest hurdles step families have to overcome is this idea that we're just going to walk an aisle... Look, it's already separating after just a minute [smoothie in a blender]. We think it's automatic cohesion, that we're going to get along and have a great family right off the bat and everybody is going to love each other and speak kindly of each other. "My new wife is going to sing the praises of my ex-wife." "My new husband is going to speak kindly of the ex-husband." You are a family, but it takes time.

Do you know what blended family experts actually say? They say it takes two to five years for cohesion to start to form in a blended family. And five to seven years to form a new family identity. You have to have good expectations, and cohesion is not going to be immediate even though you are a family. You can't expect your 14-year-old son to automatically be best friends and love his 15-year-old step brother. Adjust your expectation.

Last week, there was a couple here from Phoenix. A young couple, young family, and they are excited about moving to Branson next year. I hope they're watching. They've been watching online. They're excited about life in Branson. We had this great talk, I hugged them. As I was leaving them, they said, "What one piece of advice would you give to someone moving to Branson, Missouri?"

That would be a fun message wouldn't it? *Advice to Tourists Moving to Branson*. I said, "I can give it to you right away. Adjust your expectations. There's a big difference between being a tourist and being a resident." People come here on vacation and they're like, "We've got to move to Branson, because you know what residents do in Branson. It's go-carts every day." We eat funnel cakes for lunch. We go to shows every single day. We call those people retired. Let me remind you I'm talking to a young family. You do that every day, you're going to go broke as a resident. There is a big difference. You have to adjust your expectations. But you are a family. Don't let anybody tell you anything other than that.

What we've been talking about all through the Country Road series is how your family has a story, and I've been hearing them. One of my favorite stories this week came from my friend Mike. He was singing the praises of his step dad. His name is Canute.

"Canute was 60 years old when he married my mom. She had seven children. He treated each one of us as his own."

Do you know what we call a guy who will marry a woman at 60 and take all seven children as his own? There a simple name for it and that is a man. That's a man.

"When Canute turned 61, they had a child together."

That's awesome! He's a strong man.

Mike says, *"I can't imagine where we'd be if he hadn't married my mom."*

Canute loved Mike and his siblings as his own. He took them to church. He invited Mike's biological dad to the family holidays, so everyone could be together.

Mike said, *"Who does that?"*

And taught the kids how to work. He shared a story, he said, *"It was 50 years ago, Ted, that Canute picked me up from my first day at work at Dairy Queen. I complained that I had to scrub garbage cans. This made Canute proud because he believed you had to work hard, and you had to work your way up to make it in life. Canute was my dad. He went to be with the Lord years ago."*

Your family has a story and here's where we want to go with it today. We want you to know that every family has potential for this. If you are a follower of Christ... We've been singing it already today. "And you are redeemed, let the redeemed of the Lord say so." We've been singing that. We want you to know your blended family tells the story of God's redemptive work in man. Your blended family tells the story of God's redemptive work in his own family, the family of God. When you read the Old Testament about the children of Israel, God would speak to his children through prophets. When they would stray from him, he would send a prophet and all the prophets – I'm summarizing this – had this basic message: "Turn from sin and rebellion and return to God."

So, no matter how your family came to be formed... Whether it was through death, a valid divorce, an invalid divorce, we want you to know your family has the potential to share the story of God's redeeming work in man. We want you to understand that clearly. What we ask is that in this marriage, you make this marriage it until either one of you lays the other in the arms of Jesus or the Lord returns. That you be faithful to this one, that you learn from the mistakes of the past and you don't repeat the mistakes of the past and let your family tell the story of God's redeeming work in man.

God would send a prophet and then if they would listen to the message, these prophets would say, returning to God brought great comfort and joy. In Isaiah 61, I love this text because it's speaking of the broken hearted, those who have been hurt, those who have deep emotional wounds. Deep emotional wounds tend to follow those who come from broken homes or broken families and as they try to start blended families, a lot of them don't deal with this.

In Isaiah 61, we read, ***1 The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me... This is the Prophet Isaiah sharing this message with the people. ...because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted (those who have been deeply wounded), to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.***

What I love about this text is Jesus quotes this in Luke 4. Write that down if you're taking notes and come back to it this afternoon. In Luke 4, we read that on the Sabbath, Jesus goes to the synagogue in

his boyhood hometown of Nazareth and they hand him a scroll. It's the scroll of Isaiah. Jesus unrolls it to this passage right here and reads this passage, rolls it back up, and hands it to the attendant and sits back down. Many were amazed at what he said in awe. One even said, "Is this Joseph's son?" Then Jesus said, "What I've just shared with you, I want you to know it has been fulfilled this very day." Why has it been fulfilled this very day? Because it's fulfilled in Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 5, we read, ***17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation...*** And all God's people said... Amen. ***...has come: The old has gone...*** We're not talking today about living with your regrets, we're talking about not feeding your regrets. Don't feed them and ask Jesus to redeem your remaining days. ***...the new is here!***

We want to talk about how you do that. How does your family tell the redemptive story of God's work in man? How does your blended family tell this story of redemption to your family members and to those outside of your family? I don't know if you notice this, but this has already separated and gone back [smoothie in blender], which means it needs constant care. It's blending; it's not something you do once, walk away from it, and cohesion just happens. It takes a constant pulse every now and then. I'll put the picture up there. This is the pulse button. Isn't amazing what we're able to do with technology?

We're going to talk today about the PULSE of your blended family. Hopefully it's a handle you can remember: P-U-L-S-E. Keeping a pulse on your blended family.

Prioritize marriage. We've taught for years around here about the priority of marriage in the home and some people say, "Yeah that's great for the traditional family, but that's not what you do in the blended family." No. Not true. It's true of the blended family as well.

Genesis 2: 24 says, ***For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two become one flesh.*** The bond between a husband and a wife is supposed to be stronger than the bond between a parent and a child. Your children will leave. You can Amen that if you want. You can celebrate that right now if you want. I tell my kids all the time, "We love you; your mom and dad think you are a welcome addition to this home, but we've got big plans after you leave. That's when the party begins." And all God's people said... Amen. The priority of marriage is true for the traditional family, for the traditional blended family, for the blended idealistic family. All the different labels you see as you start studying stepfamilies and blended families, you will see the priority of marriage is key. Prioritize your date night.

This is where it gets a little weird for me and I'm just going to share this because I haven't had this happen in the last year or so, so, again, I'm not speaking of any particular person when I share this illustration, but when a couple will say, "Hey, will you do our wedding?"

I'm doing their wedding and we go through the vows, through the ceremony and all that. They are blending a family and they'll say to me, "And, at some point in the ceremony, we want to exchange vows with the kids."

I always go, "No. We're not doing that."

They're like, "Why not?"

I go, "Because you're not making a vow to the kids; you're making a vow to your spouse. These kids aren't going to be with you forever and I need them to know that."

I don't want to bring up names, but Garth Brook and Trisha Yearwood, when they blended their family... Garth's kind of a sappy guy. I heard him say on the radio the other day that they did this, "because Trisha was marrying my kids too." Don't listen to all the theology country people give you, okay? That's not good. you're not marrying the kids. You're marrying your new spouse. Prioritize the marriage.

Unite as parents. This is key. Prioritize your marriage and right behind that, you literally lock arms. Do this without the children around and come up with a parenting plan of how it's going to work. And then you walk out with your teeth gritted when you do it. Be like, "This is the parenting plan, from how household chores are divided up to consequences if you don't do them. We've decided on this." And it doesn't matter what they throw at you, figuratively or literally, you stay united as parents. You are one. The bond between a husband and wife is stronger than the bond between a parent and a child. Come up with a plan and let these kids know they are not going to break you apart. If your children are small... Remember what Kevin Leman says, "For I have seen the enemy and they are small." And they are skilled at driving parents apart. Don't let them. Make that your commitment to one another. Put that in your vows at your weddings. "These children will not tear us apart."

Let the parent discipline. Come up with the same plan, but let the biological parent... Relationship experts, stepfamily experts, blended family experts all agree on this. I couldn't find anybody this week that said the opposite or even went away from this. It's always good to let the biological parent be the heavy, to be the one that brings the plan to the child. Here's why. I never thought of it, but it hit me this week. Do you know why? It's because you weren't there for the precious moments of the children. You weren't there when the child was born. You weren't there when they graduated from kindergarten. Can you believe they graduate kids from kindergarten? Anyway, you weren't there. Your meeting the 15-year-old for the first time. I don't know if you know this, but not all 15-year-olds are precious. You will come across as the heavy because all you're (stepparent) seeing are these tough, difficult challenging moments when the parent is seeing the little boy, the little girl. Let the biological parent do the discipline.

Speak kind word over everyone. Be a blended family of honor. It is hard to tell the story of God's redemptive work in man when you're calling your ex-husband's new wife a "beep." It's hard to tell that story when you're cussing about another person. "We speak it over everyone that's in this home and we speak it over those who are not under this roof. We're speaking words of high honor."

Expect bumps and delays along the way. Don't rush it. You can't expect the teenagers to be best friends right away. We're not all the Brady Bunch. It takes time. Telling the story of God's redemptive work in man.

One of my favorite letters of redemption stories, speaking of blessing the broken road, came from a young lady in our church, one of my daughter's friends, Kinley. I want to share the whole letter she sent me. She's speaking of her parents who were in the video. That video was filmed before I ever got this letter, before I ever told our team that I got permission to share this story. So, I thought it was neat the way God worked all that out. Here's how she starts the letter.

What's up, Pastor Ted!

I feel like I reserve the right to keep this pretty informal since you almost killed me while tubbing on Table Rock. I'm friends with your daughter. My mom told me today that this Sunday, you will be giving a sermon about blended families for the first time. I bet you are nervous.

I wasn't, but now that you bring it up.

I wish you luck and I bet you'll do amazing. When I heard this was the sermon, I got very excited, for my family is a blended family. I thought I would send you my story to hopefully be an encouragement to others. Hopefully, it does just that.

When I was about five years old, my mother and I were in a bad situation with my biological father where addiction was involved, which was sometimes unsafe. My mom had to make a choice to keep us in the situation, with the chances of one of being harmed, or to remove us. She chose to leave him, and they got a divorce.

I was young and didn't quite understand. I think it was a blessing that it happened when I was young. My mom was such a strong woman and she was the best single parent anyone could be. She never showed me she was struggling, if she was. And I did not know if anything was wrong.

She taught me about Jesus and how to keep my faith planted in the Lord even when it was hard for me. I did not have a father and I didn't think I ever would.

Then something amazing happened. A man named Jesse came along. He's the biggest blessing in my mom and I's life. My mom and him fell in love and they got married in 2012. In 2013, my dad, Jesse, adopted me. I was so happy. I finally had a dad and he is the best dad ever.

This is better than Father's Day, isn't it?

God knew this was going to happen, so he gave me qualities of my true earthly father before we even knew each other. This is a short description of my mother and I's story and I hope, maybe in some way, this encourages you.

I will be praying for you. Have a good week. Good luck, Dude.

Kinley Fasnough

Keeping a pulse on your family. When you talk about blended family, there is another blended family you need to talk about. It does affect our town quite a bit when there's a marriage later in life and now you're dealing with adult stepchildren. Whether through divorce or through death... In our church, it's been a lot through death. There have been many that have come together.

When you're dealing with **adult stepchildren**, there are a lot of emotions going in. Here are the two extremes on emotions that these families tend to swing through. One, there is great joy. We have this in our church where there's a new husband and wife, they're in love. I love to use the word *smitten*. They are smitten with each other. They are in love, they can't wait to be together. They take long, romantic walks, they enjoy being together. There is great joy. I'm going to tell you this honors the Lord. I'm not talking about marriages that are dishonoring; I'm talking about marriages that bring great honor to the Lord.

On the other extreme, you have **adult children who are experiencing loss**. That's what I want to talk about for just a little bit. What are adult stepchildren feeling? Hopefully, we can have these open conversations with one another and there can be understanding and patience given to one another. Again, because cohesion doesn't happen right away; it takes time. That you would have these conversations when you feel your family separating. Do you know what that means? It's another time for a talk, keeping a pulse on your family. Let's have an honest conversation without blaming each other. Let's be open to one another. We love each other. One of us is feeling this on this side and the other is feeling this on the other side. None of these feelings are bad. Remember what we say here. Feelings are just data. But it's adult stepchildren and I'm just going to give you about four of these, but if you read Ron's stuff, he's going to give you a long list.

1. Fear of abandonment and isolation. You've been spending time with your parent after the other parent has passed away or through divorce, but this parent is no longer in your life and you've become closer to your mom or to your dad, but now they have someone new – fear of abandonment and isolation.

My Grandma Mary Jane lost my grandpa in 1980. A few years later, she started dating Leo. We all loved him. They dated for 25 years. It was so funny because they were in love with each other, they cared for each other deeply, they went out to dinner every single night together. They would never get married. I'm convinced the primary reason they would never get married is because my grandma did not want to do his laundry.

He lived two streets over and every night would pick her up for dinner. I could be 14 years old, 18 years old, 22 years old, sitting at the kitchen table, sitting across from my grandma, talking to her, and when the headlights of his station wagon pulled into the driveway, she cut the conversation off mid-sentence. She had six grandsons. It didn't matter which grandson she was talking to. She would hop up, push away from the table and say, "Lock up on your way out" and she was out.

I've even asked my mom, "Did you ever have any feelings like Leo was taking her away from the family?" "No, we loved him." Again, I know it's different for every family and I was young when it happened, but he just became part of the family. He was friends with the family before they started dating.

2. Deep sense of loyalty to the divorced or deceased parent. “I don’t want to open my heart to this new man or to this new woman...” Again, these feelings are real. “...because of what it says about my mom who just passed away or my dad who just passed away, or whether it’s through a valid or invalid divorce, whatever the case may be. I can’t let this guy in. I can’t let the stepparent be part of our family because it feels like I’m saying something to this parent.”

3. Concern for family finances. I heard a lot of stories about this after the first service. We had this in our family. Amy’s grandma died a few years ago and her grandpa, 90 years old, meets a woman online, but it was a scam. There was no woman coming up from Minnesota to marry him. He started giving this “woman” money. So, there is a valid concern to jump in there.

This is more of the concern of “Oh, great, you're remarrying. I was planning on that money in your bank account for me and my family.” Let me tell you, this number three drives a lot of families apart. It separates a lot of families. Maybe it’s a conversation you have early, but I told my parents, “I hope you have plenty of money to take care of yourself to the very end. And at the end – and I think this is good advice for all – you write one last check and make sure it bounces. I don’t need it. I want you taken care of.” We have to really check our hearts on this one.

4. Resentment that the grandchildren are getting left behind. You were grandma and grandpa to them and now you're on a cruise half the time. You're at your timeshare down in Florida. “You bought a place down in Florida? Don’t you love your grandkids?” This has nothing to do with their love for their grandchildren. We have to be very careful. If I can just say to adult stepchildren, my parents are together, but still with childcare and time spent with grandkids, we have to adjust our expectations. We have to make sure we are not putting it off on them.

So, what do you do with all these feelings when maybe mom and dad are experiencing this great joy and the children are experiencing this great loss?

1. Own your feelings 100%. They are yours. Own them. When you own them, it’s going to allow you to communicate better about them.

2. Share your feelings without assigning blame. Share them with your mom and your stepdad, your dad and your stepmom. Share them without assigning blame. I think for a lot of stepchildren that get together to talk about the new stepmom or the stepdad, there are a lot of shared feelings, but also a lot of assigning of blame. Be able to talk about it without assigning blame. “This what I’m feeling.” “This is what’s going on.”

3. Stay engaged and work through the awkwardness. There will be a lot of awkwardness in the blended family but work through it. My wife loves saying this in our home that she got from Mark Batterson, “Awkward is awesome!” As you can imagine in a small town like this and with this many people between services, we get a lot of awkwardness around this town. When we see someone coming and we know it’s going to be awkward, we’ll say under our breath, “Awkward is awesome.” That’s preparing us. So, don’t run away from this, engage.

The next awkward conversation you know your going to have, engage, and just say, "Awkward is awesome. We're going to do it. It's going to be uncomfortable. I don't know if I want to have the conversation, but let's do it because Awkward is awesome." We're going to be selling tee shirts out there in a couple of weeks that say, "Awkward is awesome" for our greeters.

4. Open your heart to your stepparent. I encourage maybe some phone calls this afternoon from stepparents to children and stepchildren and from step children and children to stepparents and parents. It goes both ways. Maybe you're an adult stepchild and you've been blaming and blaming. Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life. You're responsible for your heart 100%. And you've been torn up on the inside, blaming a stepparent for years for how you feel. I just encourage you to make that call. Make every effort at peace. Work through it.

You're like, "Man, when they answer, I don't even know what I should say." Awkward is awesome! This is uncomfortable, but we're going to have the conversation. Better yet, do it face to face. Open your heart to your stepparent; it's been closed too long. A closed heart is another term for unresolved anger. Unresolved anger is like drinking poison, expecting the other person to get sick. And some of you have been drinking it by the gallons towards a stepparent or toward a parent for remarrying. It's time for you to take that before the Lord. Give that to the Lord, not your parent. You've been giving it to your parent for too long and it hasn't gone anywhere. Give it to the Lord. Take it to the Lord. And always keep this in mind, you are part of a much bigger family. Every family in here is part of a much bigger family if you have placed faith in Jesus.

In Ephesians 2, we read it this way. ***17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household...***

Know this today, blended families, as you begin to think through telling your story of God's redeeming work in man through your family, and how he has redeemed you, how he's redeemed your family, please keep this in mind. **God extends grace to your family even when Christians do not.** Some of you, your family has been judged a lot by Christians. Hopefully, that will never be the case at Woodland Hills Family Church. Hopefully, this will always be a place where we understand it's messy, it can be challenging. We're thinking about doing a series next year for blended families. I want to invite Ron Deal to come in and speak as well, as we work through the families of Stone and Taney Counties, just to encourage blended families with God's redemptive story.

When we think about the woman at the well in John 4, this story, Jesus is talking her. ***16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."***

She responds with her story. She's telling Jesus her story. ***17 "I have no husband," she replied.***

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18 The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

If you go back a few verses to verses 13 and 14, Jesus offers her a cup of redemptive water and it is in him. Jesus said to her, ***“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.***

It’s something Rod Deal says... I emailed him this week and I said, “That ministered to me more than anything else that I’ve read this week on just practical, helpful ways that blended families can blend and keep the blend going. Ron Deal said that as a church family, every member of this congregation needs to “Sit by wells and offer cups of redemptive water.” To those going through difficulty marriages, to those who are divorcing, to those who are remarrying, to those who are blended, to those who are in blended families, to those who are coming out of blended families, whether they use the term broken family or broken home, whatever they call it. You and I, follower of Jesus, we are called to sit by these wells, to listen to their story, to not judge them, to not look down on them, but to offer them a cup of redemptive water because that is what we are all about. We do not feed our regrets, we ask Jesus to redeem our remaining days. And all God’s people said... Amen.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I thank you for this church family. I thank you for all of the blended families in our congregation and all of the stories that are being shared of your redemptive work in your people, your redemptive work in man, your redemptive work in their families.

This week, may mom and dad prioritize their marriage. May they unite as parents and come up with a parenting plan. May they talk through that discipline. May they begin speaking words of high value over one another and those who are not in the room. May they give this cohesion time. May give it the years and not think that this is something that’s going to be instant, but something that will take time.

We’re grateful for how you work in our lives. Jesus breathes life into dead people, he breathes life into dead families and dead marriages and we hold onto that. We want to be a church known in this community as a place where we sit and hear people’s stories and then offer them the redemption that we ourselves have received through Christ Jesus. And all God’s people said... Amen.