



## **I'm Not The Perfect Parent**

### **Part 1 – I've Made Mistakes, But I'll Keep Trying**

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we're starting a series called *I'm Not The Perfect Parent*, and all the parents said... Amen. Just say that to your children if they're with you right now. "I'm not the perfect parent... And you're not the perfect child." The goal of this series – whether you have children at home or your children are grown – is that you leave full of grace and peace, forgiveness and freedom for the next five weeks, knowing what you're called to do as a parent, but then understanding that you are not the perfect parent, but you're still going to be the parent.

We want to kick it off by knowing it's the beginning of the school year and recognizing all of our teachers. If you are a teacher, school administrator, a school counselor, a bus driver, the lunch lady; if you work in the schools, would you stand so we can recognize you this morning. If you're a retired teacher or school administrator, would you stand as well. Here's what we're going to do. We want to find out who has served the longest. If you have served in the schools for more than 20 years, stay standing; the rest of you may seated. More than 25 years stay standing. More than 30. More than 35. In the first service, we had a teacher who had served 45 years.

The 40 something has it. I'm not giving you a Starbucks gift card to just go by yourself. If you're a first-year teacher, would you raise your hand. He's standing. You two are going to join him... Are you local or a tourist? Where do you live? You're going to Louisiana to Starbucks... I guess that didn't work. It worked great in the first service, but... Maybe you can meet afterwards and swap some stories to encourage a first-year teacher.

I love the beginning of the school year because all teachers approach the beginning of the school year looking like this right here. Here's Tom Hanks all ready for his scene. You have your syllabus and you've got all your books in order; you're ready to go. But by the end of the year, you look more like Tom Hanks in *Cast Away*. That's why we wanted you to meet with the new teachers so...

**Parenting ain't for wimps.** If you believe this, say amen from deep down in your soul. Parenting ain't for wimps, but you've got to be the parent. This we know too: **Parenting is for a season.** You only have them for a short period of time. **But being a parent is for a lifetime.** You never stop praying for your kids. Amy and I, as our heads hit the pillow each night, are praying for wisdom, discernment as parents, and we're praying for our children. We don't believe that will ever stop. And it hasn't stopped for many of you.

When we talk about parenting, here's where I think we need a baseline. There are parenting essentials, as we're going to look at in the scripture, and then there are parenting non-essentials. We talk about this as a church quite often. The parenting essentials that the scripture lays out for us we can understand and all agree on, but then we have so many different opinions on the non-essentials. As a church, we talk about this all the time. We have unity around our essentials – what we believe about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Bible, man, sin, salvation. We find great unity in that.

In the non-essentials, we have liberty. We can disagree and still get along. We can disagree and still be family. There are different ways to do it. So, today, as we talk about this, that you would put more of your attention and efforts into the essentials and, as you work through the non-essentials, which we all have to do, you give yourself a little bit of freedom, a little bit of slack; lighten up maybe a little bit in the non-essentials.

We have a saying around our home now; it's a new call back I got from Comedian Dusty Slay. He says, "A lot of comedians come out and ask the question, 'Are we having a good time?'" He says, "I'm so tired of comedians asking that question. I come out and tell the audience, 'We're having a good time!!'" When I heard that I thought, *That's exactly what every parent should be doing.* When we go to the theme parks, we don't ask our kids if they are having a good time. We tell them, "You're having a good time." You just spent all this money on vacation or Labor Day festivities and the kids aren't getting along. Just remind them, "We're having a good time."

When chaos breaks forth in our home, when things go crazy, it's who's going to be the first member of our family to go, "We're having a good time." My daughter just got her driver's license a few weeks ago and we're having a good time. She wanted to take the test in Nixa. I think it's Monday and Friday in Nixa and Tuesday and Thursday in Branson. She couldn't wait an extra day, so we went to Nixa.

We get to Nixa... I got online and realized they stop doing the testing at 3:45. We got there at 3:05. I realized I'd had a year with Corynn, and I've not done a great job teaching her how to parallel park. We just don't do parallel parking a lot in Branson. I don't do it a bunch. We did it once and she did okay, but let's try it again. When we pulled in, across the parking lot, I saw the four cones with the PVC pipe sticking out of them. I said, "Hey, it's right there; that's where they're going to test you. Quick, let's go practice." She goes over, gets it lined up just perfectly and she comes in too sharp.

I say, "Get out. I'll show you how to do it." Do I have to finish the rest of the story for you? I think you know exactly where this story is going. She stands on the curb, and I line it up like you're supposed to line it up. I come in and I hit the back cones and PVC. While I'm doing it, I see Corynn from the neck down out the passenger window. As soon as I hit that cone, she leans down and give's me that look. I rolled the window down and said, "You only need a 70 to pass; get in and let's go and get this done. You're starting around a 90, I can tell you that. Don't screw up any of the other things." I've only got a couple more years of parenting her, but I have a lifetime of being her parent.

Let's look at the essentials to start this series off. Jesus is going to remind us what our responsibility is as a parent. Sometimes we forget this. Remember last week? As we finished up the stewardship series,

we saw that food and clothing were what Jesus called the basics. That's what we provide our children. We need to remind our kids, "You're wearing clothes and you ate today; you need to be grateful." We're having a good time.

Here's what Jesus says, and it's really where we get the idea for this whole series. Matthew 7 – **9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?"** Jesus is asking these questions and we know the answer. We are not going to do this. Here's where we get the idea for the title of this series. **11 "If you, then, though you are evil..."** Mom and Dad, that's where we're starting the series. You are evil. Okay? It's very important. You're like, "Well we just said we weren't perfect." You're evil. And you conceived children in iniquity. And we have this issue called sin.

Jesus is reminding us we are not perfect. Though you are evil, "**know how to give good gifts to your children...**" Right there we get this very first idea that **a parent's responsibility is to provide for children.** That's an essential. And whether it's here in Branson or you travel halfway across the world to a village where some mom is going through a dump with a stick trying to find scraps of food to hand to her child who is strapped to her back, it's innate in mom to want to provide for her children. It's what parents do. **"...how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"** This is in the context of prayer.

In Ephesians 6, it says, **1 Children, obey your parents...** And all the children said... Amen. This is very important to understand. **Obedience is for a season, but honor is for a lifetime.** Let's understand that because it's very important. Sometimes, I've heard from people who are 40 years old say, "I never stop obeying my parents." You never stop honoring your parents. So, parenting is for a season. Being a parent is for a lifetime. Obedience is for a season. Honor is for a lifetime.

**...in the Lord, for this is right.** In other words, how does this apply to Mom and Dad. You are in charge. You are the authority. God did not give you to your children, did not give your children to you to be your companion. Be the parent. Be the authority. Young people, please hear this. Mom and Dad are the boss applesauce. They're in charge. They have to lay down guidelines. They have to make decisions for the family. Your job is to obey. And we hope that we do this well.

**4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger...** Here we get some more parenting essentials **but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.** We are to provide for our kids, we're the authority over our children, we're to discipline our children, and we are to teach them in the ways of the Lord. We're to discipline them in the Lord, we're to teach them in the ways of the Lord. And, young people still hear me on this, our desire is, hopefully, you are listening.

In Proverbs 1, it says, **8 Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.** Listen to them, wear them. Proverbs says take them with you so you will bring joy to your parents later in life.

I'm looking down here. I asked for permission to share this. There's Roy Watson. I used this illustration in the first service and asked him a few minutes ago for the permission to use it in the first service and now in this service.

When Roy was like 14 or 15... We raised our families together at Family Kamp for 12 years, I think, at Kanakuk Family Kamp. We would always stay in rooms next to each other and camp out on the front porch. I was sitting out on the front porch by myself and I'll never forget this moment where Roy comes walking by and I'm like, "Hey, Roy, what's up." He's walking by, he's 15, he's cool, he's got swagger; that's what we call it. So, he's walking by... I go, "Hey Roy, where are you going?"

I'll never forget him turning to me, looking at me, and saying, "Oh, I'm going to my room to talk to my dad about my attitude." Do you know what I love about that? Here Roy sits with his wife and his soon to be child and Roy is bringing joy to his father and mother. He's listening to his dad, listening to his mother. It wasn't always an easy road, was it, Roy? Do you want to stand up and testify? Will do that another day. We want you to listen.

And then Deuteronomy 6 is an essential passage for our church and for our family ministries. This is the parenting essential. Mom and Dad, **5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** All of this that we are talking about. You're supposed to be modeling this. Why? This is to be upon your heart. **6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.**

And here's another parenting essential, **7 Impress them on your children.** Our children see everything we do, hear everything we say, forget nothing, and then they repeat. Children are great lie detectors. Children are able to detect when you're faking it. So, are you impressing a love for the Lord upon your children? This is a parenting essential above and beyond and more important than all this stuff we're going to talk about in a moment with the non-essentials. How do you do this? ***Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*** May the conversation in your home be a love for the Lord, instruction in the Lord, discipline in the Lord, thanking the Lord for all that he has provided for your family. May it be a constant source of instruction, a constant source of conversation from the time you get up until the time you go to sleep and all along the way.

We kind of get stuck in this "Okay, is anybody doing this perfectly?" I like to call them picture frame families. I love families in the Midwest. They love going to the beach and wearing matchy-matchy outfits and taking these pictures. Everybody does it. You've got the peach family. You have the black and white family. You've got the denim family with white linen shirts. You know what I'm talking about. It's the perfect family and they're walking down the beach. You get these snapshots on Facebook where they're jumping in the air. They're celebrating life. Life is so good. But that's not really what's happening in that family. This is what's really happening in that family. What I love is they're still posing for the picture. This child is getting left behind, getting dropped.

How about this next one? I love this next one. Let's spin the kids around. Mom has a face of horror while Dad is saying what? "We're having a good time." The bottom line of all that we're talking about,

and as we're going to talk about through the month of September about parenting essentials and how to cut yourself some slack, is God's plan for the family is perfect. His design of the family is perfect. My friend, Ron Deal, Stepfamily Expert at Family Life down at Little Rock, puts it this way. *"God's design for the home is perfect."* We don't need to change God's design for the home to try to match what we're seeing today in our families or in other families. His design is perfect. *"The homes of God's people, however, have never been – nor do I suspect ever will be – perfect."*

What happens is you and I live with uncertainty. We live with so many different motives as we parent and we lose sight of the essentials – what God has called us to – because I think we get weighed down by the non-essentials. And we allow fear to start driving our parenting. As one of our staff members said this week, "You never make good decisions out of fear." If you just wrestle with fear for a while and you don't process it well, it turns to guilt over decisions that you've already made. And if you let the guilt fester and grow for a little while, you end up with regret. There are some of you in here who your children are gone, and you think it is too late. It's not too late. The season of parenting may be over, but you can still be a great parent. You can still be a good parent without being a perfect parent.

Many of us have found ourselves in this cycle of parenting out of fear, guilt, and regret. So, I want to look at some of the non-essentials for a moment that you and I get caught up in. I believe they become distractions for the essentials. We get so worked up because there are so many... And everything we talk about for the next few minutes... There are so many different opinions in here and guess what? You can have your opinion and I can have mine and a healthy person is not threatened by the opinions of another person. And all God's people said... Amen.

So, you've got different parenting choices from the people you're sitting next to, and some of you are here with your parents. And you're parenting choices are different than the parenting choices they had in raising you. And when you were growing up, you said, "I'm never gonna..." And now you're staring to sound like your dad. How many have had that moment lately? "That was just my mother coming out of my mouth."

Let's go there for just a little bit with some non-essentials. Let's start with **when is it okay to give your baby formula?** "You did not give your child formula!" Yes, we did, at the age of six weeks old. Some people told me earlier that their mom took the shot to dry up the day they were born. I didn't even know that shot existed, so I'm learning things and we're having a good time. But I'll never forget Corynn's six-week checkup. You know how they do all the measurements. The doctor came in and we had one of those old doctors near retirement. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? He didn't have a really great bedside manner.

The doctor sat down and started looking at the computer. "Head looks great. Length looks great." Nursing really wasn't working for us. It wasn't going well. Corynn was hungry all the time and wasn't getting enough. I'll never forget the doctor saying this. I'm back in that room 16 years ago right now. The doctor looks at that chart and these were his exact words. "Good night! What are you doing, starving this baby?" Now I'm no parenting expert, but I know that was not the right thing to say. I looked over at Amy and the tears started flowing. I couldn't wait to get out of there.

Now, don't send me any emails. Some of you are like, "I'll tell you I'm a nursing expert and I helped..." I get that, but she's 16, we don't need you anymore. She's doing great.

But that night, we were in home group. And here's why home groups are so important. We were still in this... We were not getting any sleep. We were new parents trying to figure it out and didn't want to mess up our kids. We start sharing with your group what's going on and how Corynn is not getting enough. I'll never forget this lady jumping up from the home group, going into the kitchen, grabbing the free formula that we got when we left the hospital a month and a half earlier. She starts making a bottle.

I come walking in and I go, "Hey, what are you doing?"

She says, "I'm making Corynn a bottle."

I said, "Oh no you're not."

She said, "Ted, she's going to have this bottle of formula."

I said, "Oh no she's not."

She goes, "Well, why not?"

I said, "Well, for one, we don't want her going to community college, that's why."

Now, I'm going to need some of you to lighten up a little bit, especially you community college teachers. Just bring it down a notch. I just heard from one of the successful men in our church who was never nursed and went to community college. So, you're going to do fine. I just remember the stress. All over this room, some of you are like, "You have to nurse, you have to nurse." Corynn didn't.

How about this next one? "Oh, you didn't let her use a **Binky**?" Oh, we did! Until she was 2 1/2. Sure, she can't pronounce the letter S, I get that, but she's nailed the other 25 letters. We thought 25 out of 26 was pretty good. How many parents are stressing over the Binky? I keep a bunch of these brand-new ones in my bag for when I'm on airplanes. I can take 30 minutes to an hour, but after a while I get this nice gift-wrapped Binky out and take it to the parent and say, "You might want to try this. You'll have a lot more friends."

How about this one. Don't let people get on you if you have the **family bed**. That's a big one. I don't hear it as much anymore, but people are stressing out over it. "Is it okay for the kids to sleep with us." This is what we call a non-essential. We didn't have our kids sleep with us, but look at all these kids in here. Look at the dog, look at the cat. I don't know how they had so many kids with the family bed. I'll tell you all how that works later. That's a whole other series. Some of you are going, "He's saying don't judge, but I'm feeling judgment right now." We're having a good time.

Now there is a lot of guilt and probably more Mom than Dad. Mom's can feel guilt when they drop their children off at **childcare**. They go on Facebook and see the moms that spent all day making cookies and coloring with their kid. It's not a choice you got to make for single moms in this church and in our church family. It's a choice that you had to make. It was choice that was brought upon you. Some of you made the choice to be a single parent, some of you did not. But you've not had to make choices and you can live with guilt and regret.

How about **school choice**. Public school, private school, Christian school, home school. Listen, this is never going to be a church where we elevate one up here and say it's the best one. I know churches that do that. All of those people who just stood, serving our kids, come from all different types of schools. You have to make your choice.

Then there's the **school bus**. "I can't let my kids ride the bus." How many of you rode a school bus when you were growing up? Okay, look. And we're fine. Watch this; this shocks me, but I want you to look around on this next one. How many of you had a bus driver that kicked unruly kids off the bus in the middle of the route. Look around. Could you imagine that happening today? Bus drivers didn't put up with anything when I was growing up. I'm from the cornfields outside of Chicago and they would drop kids off a mile and a half from home. I can remember the bus stopping and then you seeing the line going through the cornfields of kids trying to get home. So long as you stayed out in front of the combine, you were fine. You'd get fired today if you did that. I hear parents say, "I'm not letting my kids ride the bus!" "I don't have a choice; I have to go to work."

This next one is where angels dare to tread. **Vaccines!** "Don't you even! I will not vaccinate my children!" Oh, so you don't care about the health of your community? "No, I don't!" This is probably one of the biggest debates online. If you go on social media, it is... "I don't want my kids around your germ-infested children..." By the way, talk about essentials vs non-essentials. Remember with essentials, we have unity. With non-essentials, we have liberty, freedom. Let people be. We have elders at our church who completely disagree on this issue right here. They are on opposite ends. Guess what? They get along great.

How about this one: **discipline**. We know we're called to discipline, but now what's the mode of discipline; how do I discipline? Some use time out, some use spanking. I talk about spanking, but I don't on the east and west coasts. Wow! You will be... How many of you were spanked as a kid? Did you guys see that paddle online. There's a paddle online that says, "Make America Great Again." How many of you were paddled at school? Again, you'd be fired today.

**Halloween**. "You let your kids dress up as Scooby-Doo?" Yes, we did. Do you have a problem with that? "Well, no, not if you want a demon child, but other than that..." People can really get worked up over this.

How about this? You let your kids watch or read **Harry Potter**? When I was growing up, the debate was Star Wars. Oh boy, we heard it. And now what's funny today is I have some fundamentalist friends who don't let their kids anywhere near Harry Potter. I'm not telling you to do this or not to do this; we're just

talking about non-essentials. But they'll let their kids watch Star Wars... It's just interesting to me how it works out and how it plays out.

Then here's one. How about **technology**? Grandma and grandpa, we'd love your help on a lot of things, but you didn't raise kids with technology. You didn't answer questions like when should they get their first mobile device? How long should they spend on it? What are the filters necessary to let this child have this? Do you let your kids play video games? If you do, for how long? Video games are in the non-essential. Mobile device is in the non-essential. Here's all of these non-essentials. What we are listening to are the voices of critics, people that you didn't even ask their opinion, but they barge in to tell you something your doing with one of these non-essentials and want to tell you you're doing it wrong.

Even if they don't say anything, you've got comparisons. This is called Facebook. This is called social media. You're watching so many other highlight reels and you're comparing your life, where you're throwing a child away from you, to their life where they are jumping up and down on the beach. You're comparing your struggles with another's highlight reels.

Then this is really where that fear and guilt and regret can get fed. The choices of your grown children. The choices of your adult children. The choice of lifestyle, the choice of spouse, the choice of career, faith choices. "Ted, we did all of those essentials. We read the Bible to our kids. We pray for our kids. We did family devotions. We took them to church as a priority for us. We taught them about the grace of the Lord in our lives. We feel like we made every attempt and now they're making choices that just don't line up with anything we taught them." And you're allowing that regret.

Here's what I think is happening and what I read in the scripture. You're looking for something from your child that only the Lord can give you. You're seeking something from your child that only the Lord can give you. Your child cannot redeem you and your child is not your source of life. Jesus is your source of life. In talking about choices, Paul had to be a disciplinarian. He didn't want to be. Boy, we're going to read that here. He did not jump up and down at the need for this, but he had to write a harsh letter to the Church in Corinth. He had to write a harsh letter to discipline them and to correct them. We read about his anguish. And tell me a parent can't relate to this.

In 2 Corinthians 2, he says, **4 For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears...** over these choices that you have been making, **...not to grieve you...** That's not the point of discipline. I don't want to hurt you, **...but to let you know the depth of my love for you.** That's why I'm acting out in the authority that God has given me. He had this authority over them, and he had to do something with it.

And in 2 Corinthians 7, we read about this regret that he had, but not anymore. I actually studied this when I was looking at generosity and thought, *Wow! How does that play into our parenting?* **8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter...** The letter where he was disciplining them. **...I do not regret it. Though I did regret it...** I didn't want to send it. Some would say it was a very difficult and painful letter. **I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God**

***intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow...*** which was what he was going for ***...brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...*** This would be what Peter experienced after his denial of Christ. He had godly sorrow, but Judas experienced worldly sorrow after his betrayal of Christ which led to death. ***...but worldly sorrow brings death.*** We're going for godly sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, and the freedom that can only be found in Christ.

We want this for our children. Why is it so hard for us to accept it ourselves as parents? The very thing we want for our kids, we need to learn how to receive ourselves. Whatever your regrets, whatever your guilt or fear is as a parent, I'm praying for you through this whole month and through this whole series that that would work its way into godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow because the forgiveness and freedom you are looking for is found in Christ, not your children. You're looking for it in your child. Some of you have a wayward child; they've left home now, and they want nothing to do with you. I want you to know that even though you're not feeling this from them, Jesus offers this to you completely even if your child does not. It's full and it's free.

In the few moments we have left, I just want to share a couple of practical ways, some things for you to think through as you work through and pray through that fear, regret, and guilt that you sometimes feel as a parent, knowing you're not a perfect parent, but you want to focus on the essentials and do those well.

- 1. Give yourself permission to learn and grow the same way you want your child to learn and grow.** Give yourself that freedom and that permission.
- 2. Stop explaining and defending your parenting choices to critics.** You're under no obligation to defend the choice you made about a Binky. Just don't. You don't need to do it.
- 3. Apologize, but don't demand forgiveness.** This is one a lot of parents leave out. Whether your children are at home or whether they are grown, when you blow it, when you sin against your children, call them into the room and repent and apologize. But you can't demand forgiveness. There have been plenty of times... That's why Ephesians 6: 4 is written for me because I lose it, I raise my voice. Some of you, that was your parenting style and you've lived with it now. You want to be the loudest voice in the room, and you lose it. When you lose it and say what needed to be said, but you say it in a wrong way, call your kids in and apologize for that. "Carson, I blew it and I'm sorry. Will you forgive me? Now get over here and give me a hug." You've received one of those hugs before. But you can't demand it.
- 4. Be the adult, be the parent without expecting your child to return the favor.** When you compliment your child, don't sit there and say, "Well, is there anything you'd like to say to me?" He's four. He's got nothing to say to you. Be the parent anyway. Be the adult. With your adult children, when you apologize and seek forgiveness, give them time with it. You do the right thing without demanding it from them.
- 5. Don't let regrets from the past and choices your children are now making keep you from spending time together.** Spend time. You may have to have boundaries. I have a friend in this church whose adult son is so difficult to deal with, but this parent spends time with him, but in a very controlled

environment. He isn't invited to all family functions because it's all so toxic and so difficult to deal with, but she still has a strong desire to spend time with her son even though she's dealing with many regrets and much guilt. She's letting that go.

**6. "Keep your mouth shut and the welcome mat out."** This comes from my friend, Jim Burns. It's actually the subtitle of his book on parenting adult children. It's one of the best things I've heard, if you have adult children who are making choices that you don't agree with. They don't have to see your disapproval every time they show up. Keep the welcome mat out; let them know they are welcome.

**7. Seek encouragement and advice from older parents.** Not critics, older parents who have been there before you. You're listening too much to critics. You're comparing too much online. Find someone who can disciple you that is older. This is what Paul told Titus and I love it. Titus 2: 4 – ***"These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children."*** Find someone that can walk with you.

Let me see the grandmas in the room. Roy, do you see this grandma just raised her hand? Roy, I want you to talk to them afterwards because you've got antibacterial product that's going to be hanging all over your purse. She used to let her kids pick up cigarette butts and chew on them. And her kids are totally fine. You used to let your kids drink out of water hoses and garden hoses. The kids are fine. You put kids in a playpen. You let them sleep in the back window of the car on long trips. Her kids are fine. You're going to strap them in like you're launching them into outer space.

Anybody in here ever been shot by a BB gun? Look, we're fine. Let your kids shoot the neighbors with a BB gun. That's exactly how we should be raising kids. How many remember your parents standing in the kitchen looking out the window at you and your brother shooting each other with BB guns and pellet guns, no protective eyewear? Then dad helped you build a ramp to jump your bike over the ditch. Dad would judge your performance. He'd tell you, "Hey, try to grab that limb on the way by and see if the bike will go flying. That'd be fun."

How many remember when your dad couldn't figure out which of your siblings was at fault, so he just spanked all of you? Does anybody remember that? Those were good days right there. How many remember when your dad sent you upstairs to wait for your spanking? That was worse than the spanking. Then he sent you upstairs to wait for your spanking and forgot that he sent you upstairs to wait for your spanking and you and your brother would sit there, "Do we tell him. Do we go remind him that we're waiting for our spanking?"

My brother was stubborn. As soon as we had that thought, we'd hear Ron Cunningham walking up the stairs and the belt hitting every loop. And my brother, at four years old, would be, "Dad ain't gonna break me." I'm like, "Are you kidding; I'm screaming on the backswing." How many of you were screamers before the first hit? That's right. You stubborn, older, first children have no idea. How many remember when your mom spanked you with whatever she had handy? Those were good days. Dad told you that the bell on the ice cream truck meant they were out of ice cream. Those were good days.

So, you need to find an older woman. I'm talking to young moms right now. Seek advice and encouragement. That's what the church is supposed to be.

We take a mercy offering at the beginning of every month. There are boxes out there and over at the chapel. Would you please give generously to meet the physical needs of family here at Woodland Hills? If you need help with the basics – food, clothing – or if there are other needs that you need met, would you please come forward and meet with someone from our prayer team so they can pray with you and see how we can meet that need as a church family today?

Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray that as parents we leave knowing what the essentials are, focusing on those today, prioritizing those in the home. We want to be parents who model a love for you, that a love for you is on our hearts and we show it from the time we get up to the time we go to bed at night and all along the way as we discipline, as we instruct, as we provide, as we are the authority in the home. May we seek from you what only you can give us and be a steward of the children that you have given us. We want to do this season well.

For the mom and dad dealing with much guilt and regret today, I pray that they would seek freedom and forgiveness from you and find new and practical ways to love and care for their adult children.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, I pray that today would be the day they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

It's in the name of Jesus that we pray it. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.