



**Sacred Echoes**  
**Part 1 – Walk Away**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we are starting a new series called *Sacred Echoes*. What is the sacred echo? Years ago, my friend, Margret Feinberg, wrote a book called *The Sacred Echo*. She's been here a couple of times. Her last time here, she helped train speakers and writers at our church with how to write better. She calls the sacred echo God using his Word in our lives. It just shows up at unexpected times and through different people and places. For the month of November, we want to explore the sacred echo. We hope to hear from you about your sacred echo. The teaching team will be participating in this over the next month.

We're going to start today with the sacred echo I've had for a little while now and that is talking about walking away. We're going to talk about five toxic people that you need to walk away from. But, before we jump into that, I want to just share with you a definition, a brief introduction into the idea of sacred echoes.

In Hebrews 4, we read, ***12 For the word of God is alive and active.*** And all God's people said... Amen. This is not a book that you read and walk away from; this is a book you read, and it changes you because this is the Word of God. You should go to this book to feed you every day, to nourish you, to correct you, to challenge you, and to change you. Have you ever met someone, with a particular church or group of people, who said, "I don't feel like I'm being feed"? That's on them because they are called to be a self-feeder. We should be going through this book every day to feed us because it's alive and active. For some of you, if Sunday is your only meal in this book, you're going to starve. You need to be getting in this book.

Joe White is going to be a part of this series. He called me three times this week and we talked about his part in it. He said, "Yeah, don't we need to challenge them first to actually get into the Bible before they listen for the sacred echo?" I said, "Yes, that's the first challenge we're going to give them, Joe." You know that Joe's passion is that you would memorize and meditate on the scripture as well. ***Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.***

**The Bible, God's Word... He speaks to us through his Word.** That's the first thing we want you to understand about the sacred echo is that God is speaking to us through his Word, but then **he's going to use you to speak to others with his Word.** This is the sacred echo. You're going through a daily reading plan and the Holy Spirit of God speaks to you through a passage and you're like *that one is sticking out to me more than the last one*. What is he trying to say to me right there in that passage?

Then you go to work and someone says, "I read that too and here's the thought that I have..." You start talking about it and then someone comes along that you're able to share it with in their situation. You're like, "I read something today..." This is the sacred echo.

The sacred echo is then on your lunch break, you go to a Branson Craft Mall. You walk in and there's the passage on Booth 183. You're like, "What!?" This is where it starts getting eerie. But God brings his Word to you all throughout the day. And then you go over to your parents' house and they have the cat calendar hanging on the refrigerator and you see the cat calendar and you're like, "No way!" There it is again, the sacred echo.

**So, God uses you to speak his Word to others. But he also uses others to speak his Word to you.**

Today, I want to share with you... It's a very difficult message for me. I made a big mistake this week. I'm supposed to have the notes done every week by 10:00 on Friday. That's when I send them to Katie and she turns them into all of the stuff that you see on the screen. I sent her the notes because God needs to be done speaking to me at 10:00 am, Friday morning. This is how it's supposed to work.

I made a big mistake because at 10:00 on Friday, I drove six hours to Des Moines, Iowa, and drove home yesterday afternoon from that event for another six hours. My friend, Gary Thomas, who wrote the book, *Sacred Marriage*, just came out with the book *When to Walk Away: Finding Freedom from Toxic People*. Because there are not a lot of exciting things to look at between Branson and Des Moines, Iowa, I texted Gary and said, "I'm going to listen to your book, which is over 11 hours, on audible the whole way up and the whole way back." You can only count so many hawks between here and Des Moines which is usually my activity while driving. God really ministered... The sacred echo jumped out of Gary's book and I wrote all sorts of notes and it's why I'm standing up here with them because I was still writing stuff on Friday night in the hotel and then Saturday over coffee and then yesterday and this morning as the sacred echo is still going.

But how do we walk away from toxic people? It's not just when to walk away and who you need to walk away from; it's how to walk away. Some of you have toxic people in your life right now that you need to walk away from. But I want to make sure we understand the tension with this today. We're talking about walking away, not writing off. You've heard me quote this many times because it's clear for us in biblical community and in the church. Timothy Keller puts it this way: "*Christians in community are to never give up on one another, never give up on a relationship, and never write off another believer.*" The tension is the scripture also calls us to walk away, do not associate, cut off fellowship, have nothing to do with. How do you do that without writing someone off.

This week, and how God has ministered to me through his Word and through Gary... He shares throughout his book over 24 times in the four gospels where Jesus walks away from someone or someone walks away from him and he doesn't chase after them. And as he shared... I share the same heart that Gary has. I have a high value of marriage. We're always preaching around here that marriages can be saved, your marriage can be saved and yet, at the same time, we understand that some marriages in here are toxic and will end in divorce. That's a tension I don't think we'll ever resolve or that will ever be fixed. We have to live in that. We're still going to see marriage as highly valuable, we're still going to fight for marriage, but we also...

I know I am going to allow the Lord to continue to speak this through me over the next month or two... With as much passion as I share with this, I know many of you have been hurt by that passion because there was never a way out. You're like, "Ted, I'm with a toxic spouse." And when I met with you about it, you went in to "It can be saved. People can change, and he hasn't, or she hasn't. And the church wasn't there for me when I needed to walk away from a toxic spouse."

I'm asking, "Lord help me. I don't think the tension is ever going to be resolved." But let this be my sacred echo as we help people. I want to make sure we're really clear on something. There is a big difference between a difficult marriage and a toxic marriage. There's a big difference. A toxic person is someone who is controlling, manipulative, unrepentant, and when you spend time around them, they make you think you're the crazy one. They are the person you spend time with and after you've spent time with them, it takes you days or weeks to recover from them.

Some of you are having that conversation right now about the holidays. You're telling your spouse, "I cannot go and be with your parents this Thanksgiving because you know it takes me weeks to recover from your mom." I'm not talking about a difficult mom; I'm talking about a toxic mom, an unrepetitive, controlling, manipulative person. How do you walk away without writing off?

I thought a lot of this was going to be about the church today, but I found... and after the first service, there were many tears as we met with folks about the struggle in marriage and in family. Walking away is important. Do you know why? It protects your sanity. My friend that wrote the book *Walking Away...* It's clear, it's the theme throughout all of Gary's book. When you spend and give all of your emotional energy and time to a toxic person, it takes away your ministry effectiveness. There are people who want to grow and want help and want to change and you can speak God's word to them, you can share God's word with them, but you are wasting too much time over here. A toxic person won't let you get away. A toxic person is constantly controlling the narrative and getting other people to go against you and pulling you away and taking you away and it's time for you to step back and to walk away, to protect your sanity, to protect your ministry effectiveness, to protect you calling, to protect your sleep. Some of you are losing sleep over the toxic people in your life. And it also protects your healthy relationships.

**1. Walk away from unrepentant believers.** Who's the first person that we see this idea with. We're going to go straight to the words of Jesus in Matthew 18. How do we walk away from unrepentant believers? Jesus gives us a three-step process. **15 "If your brother or sister sins..."** Please understand when we talk about walking away from an unrepentant person, when we use the term *church discipline*... I know my daughter and I have had great conversations with this at her school. But I'm here to tell you that Matthew 18 is not about someone you have a personal conflict with or a difference of opinion or you just have a bone to pick. This is for serious issues, a brother or sister sinning that you're concerned about. It's not three or four of you standing around going, "I don't like the way..." No, it starts with a personal, loving confrontation.

Step One: **"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you."** Can I encourage you? That means you don't find someone and go, "I'm thinking about confronting him; what do you think?" "Hey, you know so and so is doing this; have you seen it too?" That's when you get the word *they*. "They think you..." Or how about this one: "I'm not the only one that thinks this."

That's someone who doesn't have a great case. If you have a brother or a sister in Christ who is in sin, it's loving confrontation. Why is this so hard? Because if you ever try to confront someone who is in sin, here's the tension again. Matthew 7. Adam shared how it should be used in the first message last month in our series on *Friend of Sinners*. But if you ever try to confront someone in their sin, what do they say? "Don't judge me. Who are you to judge me?" "Don't look at my speck with your gargantuan log sticking out of your face." I'm always intrigued by that, assuming when you confront someone... Travis Brawner and I talked about this after the 8:30 service and said, "I think the person who says don't judge me is assuming that I don't have anyone confronting me in my life." A healthy follower of Jesus wants people to confront stuff in their lives. I have those friends in my life who come at me and say, "Hey, you said this, you did this." And it not just over a bone to pick, but it's like, "Hey I think you were wrong. You should deal with that."

Some of you, when you talk to a toxic person – and you've tried to cut out a toxic person from your life – they'll respond with something like this: "Aren't you supposed to be a Christian? Aren't you supposed to be loving? Aren't you supposed to be forgiving?" Can I just encourage you? Don't take advice on Christianity from a toxic person. Don't let a toxic person quoting scripture at you weigh on you; walk away from it.

Some of you have had family do that. You still haven't forgiven me. Aren't you a Christian? Aren't you supposed to forgive me?" "I do forgive you; I don't trust you. As Christ has forgiven me, I have forgiven you, but I can't allow my children to be around you. I won't allow you to abuse them like you abused me." "I love you, I forgive you, Mom or Dad. I've walked away from that. I'm giving you a pathway into a life with your grandkids, but understand I'm going to create boundaries in this relationship." The first step of church discipline is between the two of you. ***"If they listen to you, you have won them over."***

Step two: ***16 "But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"*** Why do you want to take someone with you if it didn't work on step one? Who you take with you needs to make sure you're acting in good faith, that you're doing it in the right spirit. That your lower lip is quivering, that your motives are right, that your approach is right. You really want to see a brother or sister saved and changed. Then if an agreement is made, then that person can say, "No, I was there." If someone tries to go back on it a day or week or two later, you can say, "No, I was there and here's what we discussed and here's what we tried to do for the reconciliation. I can give testimony to that."

Step 3 - ***17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*** What does that mean? To the persistent relentless, unrepentant believer who refuses to listen to the word of God, who refuses to listen to the authority of the church, at Step 3, if they haven't confessed or repented, it's at that point... Now please hear this. This is tough and maybe it's the first time some of you are hearing this, but I want you to get the words of Jesus here. What he is saying is it's at that moment the church is to no longer affirm that person as a believer. You're not acting like a believer; you refuse to repent of the sin that you're in. The problem is we rarely get to Step 3.

Church discipline happens often around here, but we don't get to Step 3 because this town has plenty of churches to choose from. What happens is when you get into Step 1 or Step 2, people leave and go to another church. When they are asked what happened, they say, "Oh, they're all screwed up over there at Woodland Hills." The problem is they forget that I know that pastor and we text back and forth a lot. We're like Ben Affleck in *The Sum of all Fears*, working with that Russian operative, staving off disaster on the back channels. That's what we're doing. We're just telling one another to be careful. Are we gossiping? Yes, that's exactly what we're doing. NO. That's a joke for those of you brand new to our church. No, we're not gossiping. How many of you remember when churches used to send a letter with you to join the next church? We don't do that in churches anymore. That letter meant that person is in good standing in that church. This person is a believe who follows the Lord and follows his word. We don't do that anymore. Now you can hide from it and instead of dealing with your problems, you can go to another church and claim that it's the last church's problems.

Can I tell you what the heart of this is? We're seeking, in all of this, repentance and reconciliation, not division. We want people to change, to repent of their sins, but I want to make sure we're clear on what Jesus is teaching here. **Walking away is not a first step.** For those of you in a toxic marriage right now that your dealing with whether or not you should leave, understand safety is a first step, not divorce. We are here to help you emotionally, relationally, and physically be safe. It's why we've often helped people separate.

If the wife has a controlling husband who is manipulating her and controlling her every step of the way and we meet with them and we see that and we spot it and he's been controlling her for 20 years, we will tell them to separate. This is not healthy. This is dangerous. But we don't go to divorce, although that may happen. We make safety the priority. So, walking away is not a first step. We're going to see it in the second person we should walk away from. It's not a first step and it's not a fast process. This is messy and it takes time. And it should. You should labor over it. You should be praying over it. Before you move to Step 3, where you're going to say, "You're not acting like a believer, so we no longer affirm that you are," that's not something you take lightly. Therefore, you shouldn't take Steps 1 and 2 lightly. You should be praying over it.

I'm telling you that our church has not done this perfect over the past 17 years. There are many people that we've had to go back to and say, "Hey, we confess before you. We didn't handle that right. We were so exhausted and so beat down by it that we just wanted you gone. We were tired of it. Would you forgive us? It shouldn't be something you rush. It shouldn't be a first thought. We walk away from unrepentant believers.

**2. We walk away from divisive people.** The apostles take the teaching of Jesus and they are going to share it with individual on how to deal with it in the church. Titus dealt with it to the church of Thessalonica as well. And here is what we read in Titus 3: ***9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.*** Now watch Matthew 18 reflected in this. ***10 Warn a divisive person once... Again, walking away not a first step. ...and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.*** That's hard to hear but true. It's God's Word. ***11 You may be sure that such people are warped and***

***sinful; they are self-condemned.*** The Greek word for warped means Satan is perverting this person and you walk away.

Charles Spurgeon... This is a long quote, but it's perfect with what we're talking about here in Titus. *Our days are few, and are far better spent in doing good, than in disputing over matters which are, at best, of minor importance.*

This is what Gary's theme is all through the book – when to walk away. His theme is if you just give all of your time to toxic people, you'll have no energy to fulfill the mission that God has you on, the calling he has upon your life. There are people walking by you that are eager for you to minister to them, but you're giving the toxic people all the time.

The Lord has used this sacred echo in my life because I've wasted way too much time – and I confess it before you – over the last 17 years, targeting toxic people in sermons and leaving out the 98% who don't even know what's going on and they don't even have a clue. "He's an angry little preacher; what's going on?" I've asked our elders to hold me accountable to this. No more wasting sermon time on toxic people. We'll handle it one on one; we'll handle it in Step 2 as well, taking a few back, but we're no longer going to preach to one person and leave the other 99% out. I'm not going to use sermon time for that.

*"The old schoolmen did a world of mischief by their incessant discussion of subjects of no practical importance; and our Churches suffer much from petty wars over abstruse points and unimportant questions. After everything has been said that can be said, neither party is any the wiser, and therefore the discussion no more promotes knowledge than love, and it is foolish to sow in so barren a field."*

Spurgeon ends with this: *"Questions upon points wherein Scripture is silent; upon mysteries which belong to God alone; upon prophecies of doubtful interpretation; and upon mere modes of observing human ceremonials, are all foolish, and wise men avoid them."*

Walk away. And this week, did we not have that opportunity on social media from John McArthur and Beth Moore, Kanye, Halloween; it all just kind of came to a head on October 31<sup>st</sup>. I'm like you know what? I'll be healthier, I'll sleep better if I just walk away from all the silliness. May we always be a church that keeps the main thing the main thing. And all God's people said... Amen.

So, I want to preach less on non-essentials... only when it's fun. Y'all I'm working some stuff out up here this morning. I don't know if you know that. I'm literally working it out. This is a counseling session for me as I'm asking the Lord to continue to teach me and to speak to me through all of this. So, we want to walk away from divisive people.

By the way, before you start thinking about walking away from toxic people, make sure you're not one. That was my first prayer as I started driving Friday, checking my own heart because the Word of God is alive and active and that took me almost all the way to Kansas City before I could start thinking about the other folks.

**3. Walk away from idle people.** This sacred echo actually finds its way into our Christmas series that starts in December. It's called a *Quiet Christmas*. In Thessalonica, many were waiting for the Lord's return and they stopped working. "What's the point in working if the Lord is returning?" You almost get this visual of them standing outside waiting for the Lord to return. The Apostle Paul says this in 1 Thessalonians 4 and it's the theme for December for us. "Make it your ambition to live a quiet life. Mind your own business..." And all God's people said... Amen. "And work with your hands." He comes against slothfulness because idleness breeds sin. Some of you are dealing with that right now in your workplace. You have an idle person in the workplace, and you know idleness keeps productive people from producing. You've got that person that's always walking around the office, sounding like Charlie Brown's mom. You're like, "Will you go back to your office, go back to your cubical. Go do something because I've got stuff to do." Not only do idle people distract people who are busy and producing, they actually eat into it where now you have to provide for them because you're not getting your job done.

So, by the time you get to 2 Thessalonians, after he said in 1 Thessalonians to make your ambition to live a quiet life, mind your own business, and work with your hands, we get it with far more authority in Chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians. **6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.** This is used like a military command. "Obey this or suffer the penalty of treason."

He goes on in Verse 11 - **11 We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies.** Do you know a busybody that's in everybody else's business and they get nothing done? We have the busybodies today. There's a platform for it and it's called Facebook. Getting in everybody's business. Mind your own business and work with your hands. If not, it's going to affect your sleep, your ministry effectiveness, and your sanity.

I asked for stories in the first service and I didn't get any and I'm wondering. Has anybody here had any success in your attacks and going after a toxic person, changing that toxic person? In 23 years of ministry, I don't have one story of how a toxic person has changed because of something I've said or done. Idleness breeds sin if it distracts busy people. Young people, watch who you spend your time with. Get around productive people. Do you want to be successful in life? Do you think your degree matters? That's somewhat important, but where you graduate from... I'm telling you that your success in life has more to do with your hustle. It has far more to do with the people you hang around than the name that's on your degree. Keep away from busybodies.

But watch... We have to watch our approach too. You see the heart of compassion in this. We're not writing off or walking away. This is what Paul says. **14 Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed.** We don't like hearing that from the scripture today, especially in a culture that says, "I don't want you to say or do anything that makes me have negative feelings." The whole point of this is that you would feel that and go, "Something's wrong with me. I need to change. People aren't wanting to spend time with me anymore. My home group, every time I start talking, they shut down. I'm being ostracized. I'm being kept out, kept away." The goal of that isn't because we're unloving. The goal of that isn't because we hate you.

It even goes on to say, **15 Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.** Go into Matthew 18. Don't treat them as the enemy. We just want you to see it. But if you go from small group to small group to small group and then you go from church to church to church, from job to job to job, and all you've ever experienced in your life are crazy people, I'm here to tell you, from the heart of a pastor who loves you, you are the crazy person. Wherever you go, there you are. And for your whole adult life you have, like a boat, the whole wake behind you. Jobs you couldn't keep, churches you couldn't stay in, people that left you, friendships... It's time for you to understand that God's calling you to change. This has nothing to do with the people sitting around you right now. It's you. Don't be all mad. "I never want to go to a church that makes me feel ashamed. I was told this is the feel-good church." We want you to understand how God changes people and it's time for us as a church to realize it's not us that does the changing. No matter how much you engage the toxic person, no matter how much you go after them online or in your family, it's time to leave that to the Lord.

One of the takeaways from Gary's book for me was **talk to God about the toxic person more than you talk to the toxic person.** When you meet a toxic person, my encouragement to you is to immediately pray for their family because somebody is dealing with them a lot more than you are. When I meet a toxic woman who I know is married, I immediately pray for her husband. When I meet a toxic man who I know is married, I immediately pray for his wife. I pray for their children because I'm in just a quick little interaction and I can move on from this, but he's going home to somebody, she's going home to someone to live out this controlling, manipulative, unrepentant, relentless, persistent, sinful life.

How do we walk away without writing off? There are two more people in the few minutes that we have. We walk away from the disobedient one with compassion.

**4. We walk away from easily angered people.** Again, if you hang around easily angered people, it's going to turn you into an easily angered person. Proverbs 22 says, **24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, 25 or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.** Walk away. Again, there's a difference between a difficult person and a toxic person. There is also a difference between a toxic person and those of us who maybe have toxic moments. I think it hits all of us at some point. Toxic people can make you have toxic moments or even toxic tendencies can come out, but it doesn't mean you are a toxic person and a difficult person. We may have different opinions, but we don't want to be ensnared by easily angered people.

**5. We walk away from the quarrelsome person.** Haven't you discovered that the toxic people just feed on the conflict. They love it. I think the term we use is trolls for it. They just want to poke the bear to get you angry so you'll respond and now they can respond back. As you and are supposed to love and pursue and bask in peace... As followers of Christ, that's what we are called to do. We're supposed to be peacemakers. That's what I love about the holidays. Things slow down for me. It's just that peace in the home. Toxic people love just the opposite. They are at their best when you are at your worst. They feed on that and they love that.

I had to unfriend somebody on Facebook last year. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done because she's in her 70s. It was the wife a Sunday school teacher I had growing up. She came on Facebook and friended me. I recognized her name and thought it was neat. But then within a week, it



was so toxic. You know how you all laugh when I talk about the independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptist? You know who doesn't laugh at those jokes? Independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptists. But when you hear it in comedy or in jokes, you can laugh. I go to a lot of independent Baptist churches and they laugh at it when they know this. But when it's online... and she wasn't even mad at me; she was mad at you, those commenting. She was tearing you limb from limb. I had to go unfriend. Why? For her sake, not mine. I had to walk away from that relationship.

Here's the bottom line. We say it around here often. ***Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down. As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.*** -Proverbs 26 They feed on it. It's like eating candy for them. ***The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.*** They can't get enough, and they want you to participate and they want to work you into a level of toxicity that joins them and then turns you against other people.

**The bottom line is you don't have to show up to every fight you're invited to, but you do need to be specific and loving when asked why you walked away.** This is what it means to walk away without writing off.

Gary shares a story in his book, *When to Walk Away*, about a young man who was raised by two alcoholics. Almost every night, his dad took out his rage on his son, very physically abusive. The young man came to know the Lord in college and met a godly woman and they started having a family. I don't know why this gets me so emotional because I just know there are so many stories in here right now with folks trying to escape toxic family members.

They started having children and Mom and Dad started watching their son and daughter-in-law and kids living life, serving the Lord, in the church, plugged in. It started to really do something. They started to have remorse for the abuse. When they started having grandkids, they realized this was their opportunity to get a do over. But when the son told his dad, "Our children will never be left alone with you." Because Mom and Dad still haven't stopped drinking. They were still drinking too much. His dad responded with, "Aren't you supposed to be a Christian? I thought Christianity was about forgiving. You still haven't forgiven me."

Can I encourage you. This is hard to say, but I'm going to say it. Do not take biblical advice from your alcoholic father. Take it from people who are walking with the Lord. Take it from people who have spiritual authority in your life and stop allowing people to twist and turn the scripture to have control over you. Walk away from that.

This guy handled it far better than I think I ever would have. He said, "Dad, I am called as a Christian to forgive and I want you to know I have forgiven you. I do not trust you."

Can I just tell you there are some here that don't like that, but the majority of people in here right now that say the son telling his dad, "You'll never spend time alone with my kids." The majority of us in here are going, "That is a healthy person." A healthy person should be protecting their family.

The son said, “Dad, I want you to know though. We’ve created a pathway for you to spend time with your grandchildren. I’ll always be there. I’ll always be observing, but I’ve given you a pathway. However, if you ever, behind my back, go to my children and say things like ‘I’d love to spend more time with you, but your mom and dad...’ If you ever start doing that, the pathway is no longer there.”

To me, that is a healthy example of someone who has walked away, but is not writing off. Could you imagine hearing the rest of that story in ten years, when Dad may give his life to Christ? And that son who had every right to hate this man and shake his fist at this man continues to love and care for his dad with very strong boundaries, not giving the emotional energy.

Some of you are entering into that with Thanksgiving and Christmas and you have to make decisions as a family, and you know going to visit your parents... I don’t have toxic parents and my wife doesn’t have toxic parents, so I can’t say I relate to this, but some of you do. And some of you need to step up for your family this year and protect your wife, protect your husband from the toxicity of your family. That doesn’t mean you don’t have a meal, but maybe you don’t spend eight hours at Mom and Dad’s house. Maybe all that can be handled is an hour and a half of a toxic mom or a toxic dad.

These are the conversations that need to take place. How do we show love and care and honor people – as they are learning in WildWoods today – without cutting them off? How do we walk away and maintain sanity and ministry effectiveness? I just keep seeing those pictures. I encourage you to study the gospels this week. As people walked away from Jesus and his message and as Jesus walked away from people... As they walked away from him, he didn’t chase after them. You and I are taking on the footsteps and the practices of Jesus and so I thank you for hearing the message today and asking the Lord work it through your life.

We’re going to take a mercy offering as you leave. We’re beyond time, so when I say amen, if you could get out of here as quickly as possible for the next service, that would be fantastic. We love you, but leave.

Father, use your Word to go out. May the message today, all that we have read and all of the scripture that we have taken in, bring the sacred echo back this week that we wouldn’t treat difficult people like toxic people, that we wouldn’t walk away as a first step, that our hearts would be full of love and compassion and kindness, but of strong resolve, knowing the right thing to do for our sleep, our sanity, and the mission you have called us to.

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