



**Rooted in the Ozarks**  
**Pastor Ted Cunningham**  
**Travis Brawner**

**Ted Cunningham:** Today, we have a message that's been stirring in us as leaders and in our church and community for a couple of months now. I've asked Travis Brawner to join me; we're going to team teach this and talk about the importance of being rooted in a community. I've been here twenty years, you've been here on and off your whole life, pretty much. You grew up here and went off to school and came back.

I would say that for the first ten years – and maybe some of you will relate to this – I was unsettled in the Ozarks. I had plenty of moments of itch. Does anybody know what I'm talking about. It's like "I'm outta here."

It's kind of that same feeling we sometimes get from our hometown. I grew up in Illinois and I was like, "As soon as I graduate, I'm outta here." How many of you had that attitude leaving your hometown? So, for the first ten years, I would say I was unsettled, struggling, but for the last ten years, I've been preparing for my old age in Branson, Missouri. I love my town. I love living here; I'm more settled. Have you ever had the itch to leave, as settled and steady as you are?

**Travis Brawner:** Yeah, I've had the benefit of being gone and coming back, but for me, I love living in the Ozarks and I hate moving, so whenever I get that itch, I tend to want to stay and have everybody else just leave.

**Ted Cunningham:** There's a good philosophy right there.

I love bulletin bloopers. My friend, John Baltes, with Silver Dollar City Foundation, collects bulletin bloopers; he has pages of them. This is absolutely one of my favorite bulletin bloopers ever. It was actually in a church bulletin. It reads: "Let's remember in prayer those who are sick of our church and community." So, if that's you, they meant to say, "... sick in our church and community."

Today, we're talking about what it means to be rooted. If you have your bibles, turn to Jeremiah 29. What we're going to see today is God's heart for us, God's heart for his people and in the text in Jeremiah 29, we're going to see that God wants his people rooted in him, in each other, and in a place. We don't often talk about the place part – what it means to be a benefit to the community in which you live.

When we say rooted in the Ozarks, we're talking about Branson, we're talking about all the way down into Northern Arkansas, and up toward Springfield. We're talking about Southwest Missouri in a lot of ways. We know some of you are traveling today and some of you are watching online from all those places.

So, what does it mean to be rooted in God, rooted in each other – the people of God- and rooted in the Ozarks? We're going to jump right into Jeremiah 29: 4-9. ***4 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon...*** A few thousand of the best and the brightest from Jerusalem were carried into exile. Babylon was the biggest city at that time. We have to understand about exile. It doesn't mean imprisonment necessarily. It doesn't mean enslavement. It means displacement, resettlement into an unknown land. So, this letter from Jeremiah, the Word of the Lord is coming to the exiles in Babylon, and here's what it says:

***5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters."*** This is a very important part right here: ***"Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile."*** There it is again, please see that. ***"I have carried you into exile." "Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." 8 Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. 9 They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.***

A few things we want you to see in this text, observe first before we make application for the people of God here in the Ozarks and the people of God here at Woodland Hills. First, "I carried you." Now, sometimes when people move to a community, we say things like, "I ended up here." How many of you would say that? There's a great way to look at your move to a community. "My work brought me here." "My parents brought me here." Some would say, "Retirement brought me here." Raise your hand if you say retirement brought you here. Welcome to the Ozarks.

But what about this mindset? What if you take the mindset that God wants his people to have, who think *Nebuchadnezzar brought us here*, but God brought them there. What if you change from "I ended up here" and underneath that you understand and you begin speaking "God brought me here, God brought me to the Ozarks." What if instead of saying your work brought you here, you say God brought you here. He has a plan and a purpose for you here.

Here's what this passage is establishing. He is telling his children, "Make a life for yourself there in Babylon." He actually said, "Don't live a diminished life; increase in number; do not decrease." "Live a full and abundant life." And then he warns them about false prophets because there are false prophets who are saying the opposite of what God is saying. When you get to verse 10 of Jeremiah 29, it says that this exile is going to be 70 years, before we get to the verse that most Christians, if you've been in the church for a while, you know Jeremiah 29: 11: ***"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord.*** The plan specifically in this text is speaking to that 70 years exile. There were false prophets though who were saying, "We're going back to Judah soon. This isn't going to be that long."

So, they had the idea of while they were there, they would live detached. “We will go over here and stay out of the way and just do our time here in Babylon.” And that is the opposite of what God’s Word says to them. While you’re here, increase; do not decrease.

So, there are many benefits. It’s important to be rooted in a place. We don’t talk about this often. You know what it means to be rooted in God, rooted in each other, but what does it mean to be rooted in a place. There are many benefits that come from being rooted in a place: vitality, security, more capacity, productivity, greater prosperity. Flip to Psalm 1 and look at the importance of being rooted.

**Travis Brawner:** In Psalm 1, we read about not someone who sounds like they’re just serving their time, but rather they are rooted in what the Lord is calling them to. Let’s start in Psalm 1: **1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, 2 but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night...** In other words, seeking what it is the Lord desires for me. **3 That person is like a tree...** Here’s our analogy of roots. **...planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season...** That’s very important to remember: “Yields its fruit.” **and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.**

We’re reading about the analogy of us being a tree. When we think about trees, we understand the importance of roots that a tree has. Roots in a tree provide a couple of things. One is stability and the other is nourishment. When I think of the trees in the Ozarks, these big oak trees and sycamore trees and many others, these enormous structures above ground, I think about the root system that must be required to stabilize those trees from the elements as they stand.

We’ve seen rootless trees; we call them Christmas trees. We cut off the roots and put them in the living room and they fall over at the slightest push or little imbalance. That’s the importance of stability that roots provide. And, also nourishment. In Psalm 1, we read the analogy of a fruit tree yielding its fruit in season and the nourishment that those roots provide to that tree so that it can produce fruit. We think of a fruit tree and the things that it provides in its proximity. Number one is that it provides shade, so a refuge from the elements. Also, it provides food, actual sustenance to those in its proximity. So, we understand, as we yield fruit and we have healthy leaves, we can provide refuge and sustenance for those in our proximity.

Then who is in our proximity? That’s our community. That’s our physical community that we are in. That’s why God desires for us to be in physical community. He speaks to it in Verse 5 of Jeremiah 29 when he says, **5 “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.”** So, build houses and plant gardens. These are two things that signal, both to yourself and everyone around you, we plan on being here for a while. We’re not planning on building a house unless you’re a developer building a spec home. You don’t plan on building a house and then leaving because there is a lot of work, time, money that goes into that. That says we’re going to be here for a while.

We’ve never built a house, but we have planted a garden. And we know in that we plan on being around for a while because it’s a lot of work. Here’s our garden. Of course, in the Ozarks, you have to have a fence because we have deer. With a garden, you have to plan it out, put some dirt in it and it’s nice when you have a couple of young men in your house that can run a shovel, and then a chicken to be

a foreman on the project. Once the structure is there, we get the dirt in and then you plant it and it starts to grow. This is getting close to the payoff (pictures of the harvest).

**Ted Cunningham:** Oh, now he's bragging. He's bragging now. Look at that. Now let's be honest. Mayor Bloomberg says that's easy; that takes nothing. How many are not shocked to see Travis Brawner's organization of the harvest. You need to do a better job getting those into categories.

**Travis Brawner:** Yes, I am bragging because it's awesome.

**Ted Cunningham:** Who's tired of seeing pictures like that on Facebook? Can I see all the hobby gardeners that are just tired of it? You can grow carrots in the Ozarks. I've tried it for years. It never happens, never works.

**Travis Brawner:** I am bragging because it's awesome and if you think your garden is better than mine, you just need to be more humble. Gardening and building signals that we are going to be here for a while connects us to the community with these things when we're there. Part of the problem we have now I think is that technology gives us a false sense of community. We can feel like we're connected, and we can feel like we're known when really, we're not known, rather we can still remain anonymous when we're connected online. If you think about that word *anonymous*, it literally means *no name, no identity*.

Sometimes it's nice to be anonymous. When you leave town on vacation... Do you guys like that when you go away from your normal responsibilities and no one needs anything from you, no one expects anything from you? That anonymous is nice every now and then, but just every now and then because for the most part, this is what most of us want. (Show and plays theme song for Cheers)

**Ted Cunningham:** Okay, if you're offended by a tavern song at church, it's [travis@woodhills.org](mailto:travis@woodhills.org). I want you to email him and let him know that you are strongly opposed. But he sang. That's the first time he has ever sang in a sermon. I'm proud of you.

**Travis Brawner:** That's how we feel; we want to be connected, right? We want to really be connected because in physical community, people don't just know your name, they know you, they know your family, they know your personality, your likes, your dislikes. They know what you're good at, how you contribute to the community that you're in.

One of the reasons it's important is because of Romans 12: 15 that says, ***Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*** We know that celebrations are better in community, aren't they? With people to celebrate with. And sorrows are more manageable when we're in community and have people to mourn with. When we look back over the years and we celebrate with the birth of new babies and with certain anniversaries and things that we celebrate as a community. In the Southwest Missouri and the Branson community some of you remember in 1991, the *60 Minutes* special that kind of put us on the US map. We were a town of 3,500 with 4 million visitors a year. That was exciting and we celebrated that.

But then some tragedies. We're coming up on the anniversary of the Leap Day Tornado that happened in 2012. And then the tragedy a couple of years ago on Table Rock Lake. Those sorrows are more manageable when we're in community. That's why God desires for us to be rooted, to be known, and to be rooted in a physical place.

**Ted Cunningham:** And just as we said, there's that mindset of "God brought me here. God brought me to the Ozarks." We also understand though that God may send you somewhere else. He may relocate you and send you to a new place to be rooted. We want to talk about that too and at the end of the message, we want to deal with when you leave the Ozarks. None of us want to be that guy that hangs around three years after high school, still roaming the halls of a high school. We don't want to be that guy, so how do you...

There are good and bad reasons to leave and, just to process that with you, if you feel God is calling you, sending you somewhere else, to uproot and to go root somewhere else... There are some bad reasons we think you would leave, and one would be reputations. Talking about how everybody knows your name and some of you are like, "Yeah, that's why I'm out of here." Sometimes it's greener pastures, it's just that itch. We all have to work through that itch when it's like, "Okay the grass is going to be greener."

But boy I'll tell you, this wasn't the case for the first ten years of living in the Ozarks, but it is now. Every time I'm coming down from Springfield from the airport or something, on 65 South, and that trip home from Springfield... You know it, you get kind of lost in the twenty miles. That Bass Pro sign that says 30 miles is inaccurate. I wish they would change that number because it's not quite 30 miles. I've driven it every weekend. But you come up over that hill and you see the Ozarks, you see Branson. I now have the moments when I'm coming back going, *This is home. This is where I want to be.* You can go a lot of places thinking the pastures are greener, but they're not because everywhere you go, there are people, right? There are people everywhere you go, and you can go from New York to L.A. You can go from Minneapolis down to Houston. You can go all different places and think, *Oh it would be better to live here,* but you just have to work through that. You can say, *I hate my job. I hate my boss.*

But what are the good reasons? We've had a lot of people leave our church and leave the Ozarks for very good reasons. I think there are a lot of friends who are watching right now from around the country. They're over a thousand miles away to care for aging parents. That's a good reason, to go and take care of your mom and dad. Work is going to send you other places. You may not be able to make the living here you thought you were going to be able to make. Marriage. Newlyweds start somewhere new or you find somebody online in another city and you get married and you go live where they are. Missions. We've had people leave our church and move not just out of the city or the state, but out of the country. God has called them to be missionaries and take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Others do need a fresh start and we get that. You have to really work through that.

Here's what we want to say when you do leave... And some of you have left a community and you've now come to this community. Be sensitive to the place where you've come. Don't bring your agenda. We all tend to do that. Some people move to the Ozarks and they're like, "Man, it's a different pace of life." It's always interesting to me the people that moved here for a different pace of life and then

they're not happy with the pace of life. You try calling someone to fix something and you want them there in ten minutes. If you're new to our area, I'm here to tell you that probably ain't gonna happen. You need to lower your expectations and you will never be disappointed. But I want to remind you that you moved here for a slower pace of life. Sometimes we move to an area...

Amy and I spent the first two years of marriage in South Georgia. That was not the community we were raised in. I remember... This was the guy that introduced us... Austin Deloach's dad... I remember the first time he came up to Amy, my Cornhusker wife from Nebraska. He wanted the dog off the front porch. I'll never forget Austin Deloach Senior going, "Hee on out heah." Amy was like, "Do we need to learn a new language?" No, *hee on out heah* means get on out of here, which is how we would say it in the north. We had to slow down how we learn like, "What did that guy just say?"

Sometimes we bring our agendas. Don't be insensitive to the history or the heritage to where you root. Become a part of it. Join in, no matter how long you're in a community, be rooted while there.

**Travis Brawner:** One of the ways you can become even more rooted is through generational roots. We've seen a lot of this around here in our community. The Lord speaks to this in Verse 6 of Jeremiah 29. It says, ***6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.***

You see, generational roots make for memories and legacy in a community. And generational roots can make for generational impact from a family in a community. Neal Postman said, "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see." That's how we plant generational roots to create generational impact. We train up our kids in the way they should go, we teach them the ways of the Lord, we teach them to follow Christ, and we teach them to plug into a community, to be part of the community and contribute to that community, to be rooted in a community.

I watched it in Jim and Suzette Brawner over my entire childhood. They started coming to Southwest Missouri to work at Kanakuk for summers starting in 1972. Then in 1985, when I was 8 years old, they moved us here to plant permanent roots here. I watched them plug into the community and contribute to the community and be a part of it.

On my wife's side, Kari Akers (maiden name), her roots are even deeper than that here. Her dad, Ed Akers, as many of you know, is now the mayor of Branson.

**Ted Cunningham:** And a mayor who is for farming. I just want to make sure we're clear on all that because mayors are getting a lot of attention these days. I'm sorry, I threw that in there. You have to stay focused.

**Travis Brawner:** He's in favor of farming. He thinks my garden is awesome too. Ted's telling *me* to stay focused. You may not know this about the mayor of Branson, but he was actually born in the back of a grocery store in Branson West Missouri. I kid you not. They weighed him on the produce scale. Of course, every time I hear that, I think *Surely, they washed that thing before the next customers came in.* I can't imagine. But then later on, his daughter, my wife, Kari was born at Skaggs Hospital back in 19...

not too long ago. And then our daughter, Kaylin, was born at that same hospital to the same delivering physician, Dr. Zeller. This is our hometown, we grew up here, it's where we learned to drive these streets of Branson, which can be challenging. We grew up in these school; it's where we got our education. It's the bridges that we jumped off of into the lake, which at the time, may or may not have been legal.

**Ted Cunningham:** Most signs prohibiting stuff in the Ozarks are because of him and his friends.

**Travis Brawner:** Now there is one particular sign at one particular bridge over one particular lake that...

**Ted Cunningham:** Long Creek Bridge over Table Rock Lake. That's not even because of you.

**Travis Brawner:** Well, it might be in part. The funny thing about that story though is when mom found out and she told dad... I'm waiting for it from Dad, right? Jim Brawner said, "Now, Travis, when you jumped off this bridge, did you jump off the road part or did you climb up where you can get a little bit higher of a fall up on that bridge?" You see, he had jumped off that same bridge in his youth, so he couldn't say... And then, unfortunately for mom, she could no longer use the line, "Now, Travis, if all your friends jumped off a bridge..." "Yes, as a matter of fact, I would."

So, we moved back, and I remember talking to Joe White. He said, "Travis, the Ozarks are a great place to raise a family, if you can make a living here." A lot of you have experienced that, the difficulty that you can have in making a living in this wonderful place to live and be rooted and to raise a family. The Lord speaks to that to the Israelites in Verse 7 of Jeremiah 29. He says, ***Z "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."***

You see, being part of a community, contributing to it, benefits the individual. And it's hard for an individual to thrive in a community that's not thriving. So, it's important for us to seek the prosperity of our community. We can sometimes get siloed, especially in our community, thinking we don't need others in our community, others in different parts of the industry that we have and different areas. We don't need this group of people, this ministry, this church, this area of tourism. We can develop an attitude that we don't need each other, but the fact is we do.

You see, we have stores and the stores need shoppers and the shoppers need restaurants and the restaurants need servers and cooks. And the servers and cooks need a hospital and a hospital needs doctors and nurses who need schools for their children and the schools need teachers and custodians. And the teachers and custodians need mechanics and barbers and the mechanics and barbers need law enforcement officers and the Law enforcement officers need city and county government workers. And the city and county government workers need shows and attractions to bring visitors to town. And the visitors need hotels and resorts and the hotels and resorts need bankers and accountant and the bankers and accountant need veterinarians for their pets and the veterinarians need stores to shop in and the stores need shoppers. You see, we all need one another. We're not isolated in a community. We need one another.

**Ted Cunningham:** That's worth... Yeah. That was Joe White memorization right there.

**Travis Brawner:** I learned from the best.

**Ted Cunningham:** I think that's one of the best things you've said in this message.

**Travis Brawner:** Thank you. Tell me more.

**Ted Cunningham:** I love it.

**Travis Brawner:** You see, though, that we're dependent on one another. Here's the important part here. The contribution that each makes to their community depends on the soil in which they are rooted. And, followers of Jesus, the soil that we are rooted in is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the soil in which we are rooted to be able to be by streams of water, our life-giving source, so that we can yield fruit in season.

**Ted Cunningham:** That's so good. The value that we bring to a church in community is what you're talking about there when you give that whole list. So, that's the question. What value are you bringing to our church? What value are you bringing to this community?

Pastor Dave Lomas at Reality Church in San Francisco... Amy and I listened to his message a couple of months ago. He was challenging his congregation with this word picture of **miners vs farmers**. We came up with this long before the whole Mayor Bloomberg thing broke and I thought it was interesting how much our country is now talking about farmers and the Paul Harvey thing went all around with God Made a Farmer. I love it because he was challenging his church in San Francisco and Amy and I listened to his message applying it to the Ozarks the whole time because what built San Francisco was mining and farming. A lot of people don't know this but the 49ers; that's actually a miner.

**Travis Brawner:** Go Chiefs.

**Ted Cunningham:** Yeah. He actually preached this message during the playoffs and he was encouraging people that... Because a lot of people come to San Francisco to see what they can get out of San Francisco and they come with their start up company, and their mindset is *I'm just going to be here for a little bit, built up my company, hopefully it goes to IPO, and then I can move out*. This was a pastor, with a pastor's heart, really challenging his people to consider moving from a mining mindset to a farming mindset.

He said a miner is someone that doesn't build a home. They set up a camp. I watch this show called *Goldrush* on television. If you've ever watched that show... One day, I would just love... If I had a few million bucks to lose, I'd go give it a shot up there trying to make a couple hundred thousand, but they are in trailers and they build very temporary structures because they're not going to be on that land long. They clear 50, 60 acres and they have different names for each of the cuts. They clear the land they take everything they can out of the land, they leave clumps of what they call tailings all over, and then they are gone onto the next land.

Pastor Dave Lomas was saying that we can't have that mindset in a community. For a community to work, we need to be farmers. We need to leave the land better than we found it. We need to build a home. Now, I'm not picking on Treasure Lake; I want to make sure all Treasure Lake people know that. If you have an RV and you go from place to place, my encouragement to any of you who are just here for a little while is when you are in Branson, even for a little while, you can have a farming mindset. Not what can I get out of this town, but what can I do to add value to this town. We even say it as a church. We have several folks that do the RV workshare type thing where they work, their spot is paid for by working, but then they move to Arizona. They are moving around the country. We applaud that; we say that's great, but when you're at our church, have the mindset when you're in the community that *I'm going to add value while I'm here.*

So, a couple of things to consider. When you have the option to leave, the farming mindset says *I'm going to stay.* Some of you need to just wrestle with that today. You have an option to leave, but maybe the Lord is calling you to stay. When you're here for a season, consider staying longer.

Pastor Dave Lomas was saying some of them just came to San Francisco for their internship. The morning he was preaching this message, the lady leading worship was there for an internship and she decided that after her internship she was moving to San Francisco. She's setting down roots in that community. I think that's just a beautiful word picture.

The mindset of the farmers says, *No matter how long I'm here, I'm going to add value. This is going to be a better place when I leave it, or, as you were talking about with generations, leave it to my children.* I just want to say one little caveat here to all of you who have stayed here at Woodland Hills Family Church over the last 18 years, I alone have given you plenty of reasons to leave and a lot of people have left, you know that. Every church from coast to coast, there are people everywhere so you're always going to have difficulty, but when we're rooted in a church, it forces us to work through issues.

I've listened back to... We started deleting messages from five years prior. I thought they were horrible. I even wondered what was going on with me. I was just a mess. Some of you said, "What's going on with him," but you stayed. Some of you have had conflict within the church or within your home group and you've stayed. In our work with couples, we see this all the time. Couples can come in for counseling and they have a list of all the reasons to leave. But can you make a list for the reasons to stay? I just want to say thank you to those who have been faithful over 18 years at Woodland Hills and those who have been faithful in our community.

**Travis Brawner:** And thankful to the Cunninghams who have been faithful to Woodland Hills Family Church. We know that some people are only here for a time, by design, and like we said, that's okay, but the point is what are you doing with your time in the community? You can still be rooted in a community even if you're a transient resident here.

There was a man named John Chapman long ago that would travel from town to town. While he was there, he would plant small nurseries of fruit trees. It was for the purpose of that community that he would plant these trees. He would nurse them to health and grow them into maturity so they could

produce fruit, they could yield fruit in season. While he was there, he would also preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that when he left, because he was only there for a time, there would be food to nourish the people and also seeds of the gospel planted to nourish their souls and for their salvation. He did that in many towns and moved on. So much that we now know him as Johnny Appleseed.

**Ted Cunningham:** Do you hear that. People are like, “Whoa, really?” I learned that this morning as well. I didn’t know it was originally in Missouri.

**Travis Brawner:** John Chapman. And we have a lot of John Chapmans that have been in the Southwest Missouri Community. Many, many names come to mind when we think of Legacy names, legacy families in Branson. We wanted to honor some of those family names, those John Chapmans to our community. The one thing that I’m concerned about is leaving names off and just understand we just trying to honor as many people as we can. There are going to be some that we have forgotten and that doesn’t mean that you are forgotten in the ways that you have impacted our community. I’m just going to read this list.

Herschend	Steelman	Speet
White	Binkly	Tabuchi
Mabe	Mayden	Skaggs
Presley	Owen	Simmons
Wescott	Whelchel	Scrivener
Akers	Patrick	Gillespie
Earls	Rogers	Spears
Cox	McCloud	Mang
Combs	Carson	Compton
Davis	McMurdo	Alexander
Meyer	Rodrigues	Burney
Murphy	Prince	Hoeflicker
Pace	Waller	Zeller
Michelle	Chase	Brown
Kershaw	Auberry	Hall
McMillan	Eiserman	Brookhart
Jenkins	Evans	Cross
Smethers	Zacharias	Williams
Aubin	Rader	Hartley
Robbins	Harris	Roden
Fevold	Gerard	Roesch
Gattis	Engram	Parnell
Yallaly	Jones	Henry
Goodwin	Sullenger	

Again, the list could go on and on and on.

**Ted Cunningham:** I think it's worth thanking all of the families in our community that brought to our community... Those of you who have started businesses here... You own attractions, you own theaters, you run theaters, you run restaurants, hotels. I hear it in you when we talk all the time the struggle of finding workers and getting the employment up where it needs to be for the start of the new season and I know you've had plenty of reasons to say, "Let's just shut it down," but we say thank you for taking it seriously and for knowing the value of this community.

I was asked yesterday by a guy in Springfield... When he found out I lived in Branson, his response to me was, "Why Branson?" I'm like, "Have you not been there? It's pretty amazing." I started showing pictures of trout and bragging a little bit with the trout that I caught recently. Because I can't farm. I don't have the brains for that.

**Travis Brawner:** Farming is easy.

**Ted Cunningham:** Yeah. I just think it's important for us to recognize and just say thank you because when you're rooted in God, rooted in others, and rooted in a place, that's something, as you've talked about, where we mourn together and we rejoice together. I hope you get that feeling when you travel, whether you're coming north on 65 or south on 65, wherever the Ozarks home is for you, that you just maybe drive back to your house today after this service and say, "Thank you, Lord, or how can I be rooted."

I think this is important. I met somebody last week. I just want to share with all those watching online because sometimes people will feel called to go somewhere else for all the reasons we gave. They'll move to another community. I talked to a couple last week from St. Louis who still watch online. We set up livestreaming online, those of you who are watching, we set that up for the purpose of our church family who is traveling, those who are sick.

We view online and livestreaming as a supplement, but not as a place for you to root. We can't stress it enough. When you move to another community, we want you to join the people of God in that community so you can be rooted in a church and you can be rooted in the community and make that community a better place. It's easy, at the beginning with technology, to be disconnected. Technology has so many benefits and there are so many great things we are grateful for, but we don't want you to use livestreaming as a place where you root. You can be a part of us, we are glad that you're here. Visit us when you come here on vacation. We love that. But find a church, be rooted in God, rooted in each other, and be rooted in the community because we believe this around here: **You can't expect your children to prioritize what you marginalize.** You want your children rooted in God, rooted in each other, and rooted in the community for how ever long your there.

Woodland Hills, this whole rooted thing comes back to us. We exist for the good of the Ozarks. We want you to be rooted here. We want you to work through struggles. Some of you, as we joked earlier, may be sick of a church and community, but would you just pray through that? Would you ask the Lord to give you discernment and clarity for ways that you can be plugged in, serve, and have a farming mentality in the Ozarks?

Would you stand and I will ask Travis to close us in prayer.

Father, we love you and we're grateful for the Ozarks. We're grateful for the wonderful community that you've blessed us with. We're thankful for the people that are here, Lord, regardless of how long they're here, we pray blessing upon them.

Father, as we come to you today, we pray for this community. We seek the peace and the prosperity of this community and we each ask ourselves what it is that we can do to add value to this community, to contribute to the prosperity of this community. Help us to lead humble lives in such a way that serves you, that seeks your will for our lives, and for the people around us.

Help us to be a refuge and sustenance for those in our proximity, Lord. We love you and we thank you and we give you praises in Christ name. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.