



Lessons Learned

Part 3 – Praying for our President

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're going to start by finishing up this series. I know last week Adam said, "This is the last part," and it was our plan to let that be Part 3 and the last part of the series. But with all that's taking place in our nation, from the riots on the Capitol a week and a half ago until what we're heading into with inauguration, we felt it was time to unite as a church, to come together and make sure we are living life out as followers of Jesus, living out the scriptures.

We're going to start by praying for our president. You're asking which one? Both of them. Out going president, incoming president. We're going to turn to the scripture in a moment, but let's talk about the sovereignty of God over our nation.

I had a great call with my friend Alex Himaya this week. It was about an hour. Pastors these days are leaning on each other now more than ever for fear of the emotions getting the best of us as well. It's just been a crazy year. Political unrest that is now settling in. I just want to start right off the bat by saying Woodland Hills Family Church stands in direct opposition to all lawlessness. All of it; going back to last summer and going back to week and a half.

We believe that the primary task of government is to promote good and punish evil. And for our law enforcement, yes, there have been a couple of incidents that have been terrible that we stand in direct opposition to, but we have many in our church and in our community that serve in law enforcement and we stand with them. We encourage you, we support you, we know that every day you get up and go to work to promote good and punish evil.

As we jump into this, Alex and I were talking about it this week. We just said have you ever lived in a time, have you ever done ministry in a time where there have been such extremes? Maybe you feel like you're getting pulled to an extreme, to a place you don't want to be, to a point where you're like, *that's not me. That's not what I want.*? It's crazy.

I said, "The problem is, as I've talked about this with my kids..." I have a 15-year-old and a 17-year-old. I hope you're talking to your teenagers about all that's going on. I sit down... Both of my kids are born again believers, so they share my faith, they share my values, and they share most, but not all of my political opinions. Here's what they are sick and tired of if I can speak for them. They are tired of our tone. They're tired of the outrage and the bitterness and the anger and the screaming... They're not into it.

Here's what I kind of boiled down for Alex and then he added something that was so profound and has been with me all weekend. I said, "We're saying the right things, but we are often saying it in the wrong way. He said, "You know, Ted, when we do that, our children become easy prey for those who are saying the wrong things in the right way." Let me say that again. I think we're saying the right things, but often we say them the wrong way. And if we keep doing that, our kids are going to start listening to people saying the wrong things, but in the right way.

I want to just share what's going on in our church. I can address the nation, but it's more important to me that we stay in unity as a church. We know there are a lot of **feelings** going on right now. We know there are those in here who are mad as can be. I clean that up for everybody. You're mad, you're frustrated, you're disillusioned, you're angry with where you think we're headed. A lot of that is conjecture maybe, but some of it is true. You're just mad. Then over here – again, I'm talking about our church, not our country – there are those that are a little bit relieved. There are those who feel like maybe the tone is going to come down just a little bit. Again, I'm talking about people sitting near you this morning. Those watching with you online right now. It's too much.

We have people who are like *I can't share what I think because I have people that as soon as I share they are on me. So, I don't talk about any of this stuff.* Then you have people over here who are just uncertain. There are just all sorts of feelings we could address all day.

We don't just have feelings, we have **opinions** going on. There are some of you who believe we don't talk about politics enough, and there are those who think we talk about politics way too much. I want to tell you if you only knew how much we held back...

So, there are those extremes, and some are just thinking it needs to be addressed. I was out of town last weekend, but I got texts from folks going *I'm praying for you today...* People were just expecting us to talk about the riots. I love this quote that is attributed to **Winston Churchill**: *"No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the other forms that have been tried from time to time."*

Here's where we start today – being very clear with what has happened up to this point and what happens from this point going forward. God is sovereign over the nations, over all nations. He is all-powerful over this nation. He is on the throne and not shaken by anything going on. Many look at the Book of Job as a book about suffering, and yes, it is a book about suffering, but the wrestling that goes on in that book, the dialogue between Job and his friends and then God getting the last word at the end of the book, it's speaking clearly of God's sovereignty over our suffering.

You see in this book that Job is stripped of his possessions, his family, his health. He has three friends that come in and they start pontificating over why it happened. The three of them basically say the same thing. "You're suffering because you sinned." Job comes in in Chapter 12 when he's replying to his friend Zophar. He makes this statement about God's sovereignty over all, but very specifically about the nations in Chapter 12: 23. **23 He makes nations great...** Let me say that again. God, no man, makes nations great. **...and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them.** And he will even use leaders to do that. Don't be concerned about leaders. **24 He (God) deprives the leaders of the earth of**

their reason; he makes them wander in a trackless waste. So, we have to be very clear that God is over this nation. People ask, “Where is God right now?” He’s the same place he is over this nation as he is over Haiti, over Tanzania, over Indonesia. God is in control. And nothing will shake him.

And if I can just get hold of this myself because going back to last summer... Boy, the virus... let’s just put that aside for just a second. We stood up here and we talked about the opinions. I shared a Make America Great again hat and a Black Lives Matter shirt. I said there are people in here that feel this is a sign of patriotism and there are people in here who are scared of this hat. There are people in here that see this as a sign to get our country to wake up to social injustice and there are those who are scared by this.

It was at that point, all the way up until now, we’ve been talking about when are we going to figure this out? Again, I’m not talking about citizens in the nations, I’m talking about Christians in the church. When are we going to start to understand that God is in control? And people this week are talking about the nation going down. I’ve got great news for you. The church will never go down. It never will. You can rest in that. And every time I’ve said that to somebody I get, “I’m not talking about the church; I’m talking about the nation.” But I’m talking about the church. God is sovereign over the nation.

We read this in Proverbs 21: 1 – ***In the Lord’s hand the king’s heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.***

I just want to remind us that as we go through a new season as a nation, we know this, and this is the promise that Jesus made. ***“I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*** The people this week... My inbox is filled with conspiracy theories. And it’s getting weird. I read stuff and I go, *this is a smart person. This is a person who has walked with the Lord for a very long time, and they are giving me this as truth.* Do you know why I think I’m getting so much of this? It’s because we’re not allowing scripture to drive the bus. We are allowing emotions to drive the bus. I’m just shocked by what I see and what I read. I’m like, *you can’t believe that’s true. You haven’t lived that your whole life.*

People are like, “Ted, what are you going to do when Facebook takes us down?” Quit giving them so much dang power. Facebook will never take down the church. I’ll say it again. Twitter will never take down the church. They’re like, “They’ll silence us.” They can’t. They cannot silence the church. Why? Because you’re still going to share the good news of Jesus Christ with lost neighbors and lost co-workers and families. We’re still going to send out missionaries to go take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

There is nothing the government or big tech does that will ever bring down the church. And if I can encourage you... You are going to live this out. You can be a patriotic American without being a toxic Christian. That was terrible. There were seven of you. The rest of you are like, *I like my toxicity. And until some things get straightened out, I’m going to stay mad.* Well, you’re a bucket of sunshine to have in this church, I’ve got to tell you.

Noting a republican president, nothing a democrat president will ever do will ever bring down the church. Please go and proceed with caution this week. I already called a friend of mine over here. I'm not going to point him out. Dean. Dean's going to have a heart attack. I said, "Dean, settle down." His wife's going to help him this week. I've never called you out, Dean. I hope you stay.

But what is the one thing we can all agree on? We can all agree on praying. Listen, since this church started 20 years ago, we have prayed for President Bush, President Obama, President Trump, and I declare to you we will be praying for President Biden. Do I need to say it again? I feel I do because I'm getting some people going uh huh.

This is the part... You know I love telling jokes. This isn't a time for joke telling. It's time for the church to wake up. It's a time for the church to go all the way back to the beginning of summer when we started getting really worked up over things. The church needed to be confronted with some things. We addressed them all. We talked about the Imago Dei. We confronted these head on. We need to continue to confront this. I will be praying for President Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris. I invite you to join me in doing that.

1 Timothy 2 says, You want to build the church? Let's start with prayer. You want the church to have unity? Let's start with prayer. Paul tells Timothy, ***I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives...*** Could we get back to peaceful and quiet lives? I don't find the peace and quiet in my government. I'm not looking to them to be the source of that. My source is Jesus. I rest in him. You rest in him. The sovereignty of God, you rest in him. ***...in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.***

Let's live in peace and quiet. I've yet to meet someone who has come to know the Lord through social media rhetoric. "I went online, had a friend who yelled at me, was convicted, and I gave my life to Jesus." Has anybody got that story? I ain't got that story. ***5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.***

We're going to take time to pray today as we pray for the outgoing administration and for the incoming administration. I'm sure things are going to be done in the next four years and this I know frustrates many of you, but I spoke out when things were done poorly in the last four years and I tell people I'll only ever talk about politics when the Bible does. That's it. And it has a lot to say about the role of government and your role and my role as citizens.

Father, we pray for President Trump and Melania as they leave office this week. First and foremost, for President Trump, Vice-President Pence, President Biden, and Vice-President Harris. We pray for safety for them. We pray that all of those who are guarding our capitol now, we pray for their safety. We pray they have the freedom to do their jobs and they can squelch out the evil that may come against them. We, first and foremost, pray for all of their safety. We pray that as President Trump leaves office, as

Vice-President Pence goes to the inauguration. We're seeing different types of leadership. Give us wisdom in processing this according to your word, that that is driving the bus for us and not emotion.

I pray for President Biden as he steps into office and will make decisions immediately, day one. I pray that his decisions promote good and promote life and punish evil. Pray for Vice-President Kamala Harris who has a big job presiding over the senate, a split senate. There is going to be so much thrown her way.

I pray for this church. I pray for the one right now with resentment and bitterness and frustration that this would be something they would bring to you, that they would rest in you, that they would live in peace and quiet as a follower of Jesus, doing what they are called to do. When we're called to vote, we'll vote, when we're called to speak out, we'll speak out. We can do all this while praying for our leaders. I pray that as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can come together and have unity not because of a political party or a political person or a politician, but as followers of Jesus. Jesus, the mediator between God and man. We rest in that today.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen.

Well, if you are ready to go to battle and battle in a different way, would you stand as we continue to worship. [Singing *Battle Belongs*]

Sermon Number 2 – **4Weeks 4dates – Part 1 Terms and Conditions**

Okay, you may be seated. If you want to hear a sound moving into the next sermon, it goes like a car squealing to a stop. That's what it's going to feel like – this hard right turn. Don't turn that into anything political.

We started planning for this relationship series months ago and it's called *4dates 4weeks*. We said if we address the unrest and the need for prayer this week, and don't introduce it... We have to launch it today because the competition begins today. This is a competitive series for the next four weeks. It's encouraging all of you – I'll talk about who *all* is in a second here – to go on four dates in four weeks and there are going to be prizes along the way and a big prize at the end. Because over the last few months, working with yes, the citizens of our nations, that's been one area, but also now the couples of our church and community. We need to get back to some teaching on marriage and relationships.

So, Part 1 is called *Terms and Conditions*. You may see this when you give Apple your life when you hit that button "I acknowledge terms and condition." That's where we're going to start as we launch this today. So, who is this series for and this competition for? It's for all marrieds. Whether you've been married a week or two or you've been married for 50 years. It's also for all dating couples. This is very exciting. If you're a young adult dating, teen dating, there is a competition for you with a big grand prize at the end that will not include an overnight. Can I get an amen on that one? So, it's for all dating couples. It's for all engaged couples. To begin the competition... And it's for all singles! Here's why. If you've been waiting to ask someone out on a date, this is the perfect time. You can win prizes and have it paid for.

I was talking to a friend the other day who works at Focus on the Family. I said, "I heard you met somebody online?" She said, "Yeah, and he came for a visit and when he got in the care he asked, 'Do you have gift cards to anywhere you want to go?'" I was like, "Oh, that's not the guy..."

But here's another reason why this series is so important for singles. We say it around this church and have for years, **Every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers**. And we need singles in this church, whether you've been married and you lost a spouse, whether you've been married and you're no longer married, you've never been married, you are a backup singer to the duets all around you.

Where do we get this? It's the Song of Solomon 1: 4. This great book of the Bible is eight chapters. In chapters one and two, they are dating or courting. In chapter three, they get married. In chapter four they have the honeymoon. And then in chapter five – eight, they are building faithfulness and commitment into their marriage. You meet in the midst of Solomon and the Shulamite woman in his duet and in these lyrics going back and forth. You meet the daughters of Jerusalem. They start in Song of Solomon 1: 4 and say, ***We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.***

One of the things I've seen over the years working with couples is they come in for counseling, you're getting somewhere with them, but then you realize they have jaded voices in their lives. The lady is going to go and have margaritas at the Holiday Inn with friends. I stole that from a country song. She's going to go out and you know these voices are not good for their marriage. They are voices that need to be turned down or muted altogether. Some of you had bad backup singers in your family. That doesn't mean you don't go spend time Mom and Dad, but you need the voices in your life that are rejoicing, delighting, and praising your love.

Amy and I have backup singers. Amy and I delight in them. We are backup singers for them; they are backup singers for us. You don't need a choir, you just need a few people rejoicing and delighting and praising in your love more than sparkling cider. You need this, the people around you need this, so please dig into this series. Singles especially. We're going to end this series on Valentines Sunday. Valentines Day is on a Sunday this year. That entire message is going to be geared toward singles and young adults. We want you to be a part of it. We hope that in these dates that we talk about, there are going to be some people that invite a couple out on a date. A single invites a couple out on a date. You're like, *I don't want to be a third wheel*. You're not a third wheel; you're a backup singer.

There are widows and widowers that you're going to hear from during this series. We really encourage you to think about who you can come alongside and rejoice and delight and praise their love. A young couple, supporting and encouraging their young, budding love.

In a moment, we're going to do a competition as a church here and across all campus. We're going to give away a gift card. It's a little bit different way for all those at home. Everybody is participating because everybody can be a backup singer. It's a big gift card so if a ten-year-old wins it in here, you have to take your mom and dad on a date. I want to be really clear; This is not just for married couples. We want to encourage all of our church to be voices that rejoice and delight and praise the love of the couples, as Woodland Hills desires to be that backup singer for you as well.

If you were part of Twoignite for six and half years at our church, you know that this was a primary verse for us: Ecclesiastes 9: 9, which says *Endure life with your wife all your miserable days*. When I misquote that at Baptist churches, I always get, “mmm, that’s so good.” That’s not what it says. It doesn’t say endure life with your wife, it says, ***Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.*** Toilsome there means *grueling*. God did not give you your spouse to be the grind. He gave you your spouse to go through the grind of life with. Again, for my single friends in here who are meeting people online... Meeting people online is great. A good match is a good start, but it’s not a guarantee of marital satisfaction.

I’ve been joking with my friend, Paul Harris, who I know tunes in on Sundays. We both kind of share this joke. We don’t care where you meet: eHarmony.com, match.com, farmersonly.com, ancestry.com. We don’t care how you meet. We were joking this week because I had a new course come out called *Helping Couples Win*. Paul and I are working on a series just for Arkansas called, *Helping Cousins Win*. I think it’s going to be a big hit. Sorry Jim Brawner. Jim and Suzette Brawner don’t think that’s very funny. We love all our Arkansas family down there, and we want you to get that course; we’re going to give a discount.

But enjoying life together. Here’s what I love about marital satisfaction in the toilsome labor... It’s based on factors and skills, which is what we’ll be talking about in this series, that couples can do something about in any season or stage of life. I work with couples and often times, they want us to do something for them about this. One British psychologist... It’s not in any journals, but in 2011, he coined the term *happiness addiction*. He said, “We all have this problem where we can’t find joy now because we’re always waiting for it later.”

We are in a difficult season right now called a pandemic. When we leave here today or tune out today, we’ll still be in a pandemic. But can we enjoy life in the middle of a pandemic with our spouse? And the answer is yes. If you came in here with a five, seven, nine-year-old, after the service, you’re going to pick up... We need you to pick up your five, seven, and nine-year-old. I can’t help you out of the stage of life that you’re in. What we can do something about are the factors and skills. So, don’t wait for a distance season to enjoy life and marriage. Don’t wait for another stage. “Just get these kids out of the home.” “Just get these kids off to school.” “Just get this baby sleeping through the night.” You can enjoy life at any season or stage of life. Why?

What was natural early on must become intentional later on. We’re going to be talking about quality time. We’re going to talk about honoring one another in this series. You didn’t have to work on that when you were dating. It was like breathing; it was easy. Remember when you fought to get off the phone, each telling the other to hang up first. When’s the last time you did that as a married couple? What was natural early on must become intentional later on. So, we’re going to become intentional with the factors and skills that lead to high levels of marital satisfaction.

You’ve heard me say before that I’ve gotten in so much trouble with autocorrect on tweets and Facebook posts. I was recently at a church – true story. I sent them all my notes, they put on the lower thirds, and it popped up while I was speaking, but I hadn’t gotten to the point yet.

I look out in the congregation and everybody is looking puzzled. What it said was, "What was natural early on must become international later on." So, I'm here to tell you that you don't have to leave the country to have a great marriage; we're actually encouraging you to stay in the Ozarks. You can have a great marriage here in the Ozarks.

So, here are the terms and conditions that we're going to launch. The competition starts right now. So, you can count IHOP after this if you want, but we want it to be a legitimate date. So, let's give you what it means.

Next week, we're going to give out a big prize for the **most creative date**. In a moment we are going to talk about a creative date. You can win this. Church at Home family, you can win this. You can win it here on campus, but we'll... We will give you the hashtag in just a second. I'm assuming you know what the hashtag is going to be. But we'll give out a prize for most creative.

The last Sunday of the month, we'll give out a prize for **most adventurous**. My daughter has been dating Caden Hazel and she told me last night, "I think we're going to win that prize. We're going to go skydiving." And I said, "Ha ha, no you're not. You are not going skydiving. You can go put put at the Big Cedar and be with alligators." Most adventurous will be the last Sunday of this month.

And then February 7, we're giving out a prize for **most romantic**. And then there will be a big grand prize.

But I want to talk for just a moment to someone who has been creative, adventurous, romantic. Lisa and Rick Whitmer have been... They haven't been to church since March. They are one of these couples that we honor. We honor their whole family. Because of some of the underlying health conditions of extended family and they all work together as well. They are playing it safe during the pandemic and we honor that. They've been very creative. This is them celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary, so can we say congratulations on 30 years? But look at that candle; it's probably still lit. I don't know how... It looks like that thing is going on forever. So, our first gift card goes out to Rick and Lisa Whitmer. We're sending you a \$100. Door dash gift card. It's being texted to you at this very moment. Don't you love technology? So, let us know what your next date looks like. And, Rick, don't be cheap; spend it all on one date.

We want you to let us know about your dates this week and it's starts right now with #4dates4weeks. At the end of this time, you're going to be able to register that you qualified for all four dates. Again, whether you're dating, engaged, married, or you're considering, in this service or later on today, asking out that girl you've been waiting on for a while; you're going to ask her out.

Here's the cool thing. We have a lot going on at the end of the series. We're ending the series on Sunday, February 14, Valentines Day, in the evening with **Date Night Comey**. So, we've got my buddy, Johnny W. who is going to come and headline that for us and we'll have some other prizes along the way.

If you register for this, it will count as your fourth date. We're letting that qualify you for it. But we need you to know we can only do 400 tickets here on campus. It will be livestreamed but not left On Demand after. So, you have to watch, you have to engage with it.

I don't know if you've been a part of Date Night Comedy, but the first time we did it, my friend, Jason Earls, was here. And then John Branyan, Paul Harris has done it. So, it's going to be a good time. Everyone is welcome to come. Tickets will go on sale later this week. If you qualify for all four dates, it puts you in the grand prize running. You get to pick, married couples only, between going to Blackberry Farm, one of Amy and my favorite places to stay in the Smokey Mountains, for three nights, all expenses paid. Or, if you are a beach person, you can go to the Water Color Inn in Santa Rosa, Florida, which we love that place. The shampoos and soaps they are like it's painters stuff... But you get to pick.

For our dating couples, you will go into a drawing for a grand prize and you will receive a \$1,000.00 gift card to a day at Big Cedar. A DAY at Big Cedar that ends with an appropriate drive home and dropping her off. But dating couples get \$1,000.00 for a day. Let me just say this to all the men in here. You know if it says Big Cedar on it, it also works at Bass Pro. If you spend it on Bass Pro, sirens will go off and you will be in big trouble, so you cannot spend this at Bass Pro.

We want to get this competition started right, so we're going to give away a \$250.00 gift card this morning. And everybody here, since we gave one to Rick and Lisa, we're not doing this online right now, but you can participate. Hopefully the cameras will pan around here. At the gathering place, the chapel, outside, they are going to let me know. Everybody can participate. We are going to do the *sit down if* game. Everyone stand. You're going for a \$250.00 gift card to Big Cedar. I'm going to remove some people right away who need to be removed. And you are going to be grateful I did this.

Sit down if you will not be cheering on the Chiefs today. Judge them all. Turn around and judge everybody sitting down right now. The Bears are out, so we can't do the Bears. That wasn't as many. I think people are lying if you want to be really honest right now. How many of you are going to cheer them on just to stay in this contest?

Sit down if you think I talk about politics too much. Okay, that was a joke.

Sit down if you've never tithed. NO! I'm just kidding! That's a total joke. Do not sit down.

Sit down if you were born on the 31st day of any month.

Sit down if you've ever owned a pet rabbit or a pet snake.

Sit down if you have ever been on a motorcycle.

Sit down if your mom drives a minivan. OH! The whole Watson family is out.

Sit down if you have a tattoo that no one knows about.

Sit down if you've never had stitches.

Sit down if you've been on a date in the last month.

Sit down if you've been on social media in the past hour.

Sit down if you've never been to Disney World.

Sit down if have ridden a camel.

Okay, I see some great backup singers standing up right now that I hope... and, young people, that you'll take Mom and Dad on a date.

Sit down if you've won a gift card in your lifetime.

Oh, this is going to be very expensive for the church. We're going to need another... Who do we have standing over at the Chapel? Oh, 10:00, you're killing me. The last service, we had a young budding love couple, very young adult couple and then a senior lady. She looked over and saw the young couple and she said, "I yield." That's a good backup singer right there.

Sit down if you're dating someone, but you wish you weren't.

Sit down if you brush your teeth before drinking coffee in the morning.

Sit down if you've ever posted a picture of a Starbucks cup on Instagram.

Sit down if you spent more than 20 hours playing video games in the past ten days.

Sit down if you are good looking, but not conceited about it.

Sit down if you have any eye color besides green.

Sit down if you are under the age of 20.

Sit down if you are over the age of 30.

There's one in the Chapel. Get their names and we're calling it a day.

Dating starts now. See you next Sunday.