



Family Values (Part 6)
Serve the Church
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We are glad that you're here. We are in this series called *Family Values* and we've been looking at these family values – shared beliefs that establish our priorities, guide our decisions, determine how we treat one another. We've been taking points from our family constitution and going through them each week. Today, we are talking about *Serve the Local Church*

This is a passion of ours. We taught this to our kids. I want to jump right into Hebrews today and remind you why you're here. Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward Love and good deeds.

Gathering with God's people is important. When we gather, this isn't just worship, it isn't just teaching, but it's encouraging one another and spurring one another one. And that's why we shouldn't give up on meeting together. I don't know if you watched a few weeks ago on that snowy day and I was in here teaching alone to an empty room. I ain't gonna lie to you. I hate it.

I absolutely hate going straight to camera. It was pretty obvious when you watched it. I had a little bit of an attitude in doing it. Why? It's because I want to be here with you. there is purpose for us gathering as God's people and we should never give up on this. Actually, we should be prioritizing this. We told our kids, as they were growing up, – this is something we plan for during the week. Sunday isn't just a how are we feeling, do we have anything left in the tank? What else do we have going on, can we sit this one out? No, we prepare during the week because a Sunday morning decision is made earlier in the week. So, we don't give up on meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more so as you see the day approaching.

So, today, when you are gathering with other believers in Christ Jesus, you should be encouraged in your ministry, you should be encouraged in what God has called you to do and the places he has placed you around the community and around Southwest Missouri. So, the line in our family constitution is number 8. We simply say we will love, support, and serve our church. Mom and Dad, if you want your children to love Jesus and the bride of Christ, they need to see that in you. That's what this whole series has been about. Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, what's on your heart? Because what's on your heart will find it's way onto the heart of your child. Mom and Dad, you are the primary author of your child's heart.

We read in Acts 2 that the first century church devoted themselves to this gathering. What does the word *Devote* mean? It means giving all or a large part of one's time, and resources to a person, activity or cause. We say around here – Inspiring the family to become fully devoted followers of Christ. He has our undivided allegiance.

Here's what we read – ***They, the first century church, devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common, so much to the point that they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. The gathering was about taking care of one another and the physical needs of one another. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.***

I believe when you leave here today, no matter what you've had to deal with, no matter what sin you need to repent, that you should do business with the Lord today as you gather with God's people so that you can leave refreshed and renewed in Christ Jesus with glad and sincere hearts. This is why when people say, "I don't go to that church; they enjoy each other too much..." I don't want the alternative. I don't want you leaving going, "That was a miserable place to be. They don't like each other there. They don't get along there."

Scripture goes on to say, Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people, and then this is key – and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. In other words, as a church, we never want to focus on growth. We never want growth to be our priority. We want health to be our priority. We want to make sure we are fulfilling the purposes of God for this church, and we leave the growth up to him.

I was talking to one of my dearest friends this week. His initials are Alex Himya. We love Alex around here. Alex and I are two very different individuals. As we were talking about our churches and everything going on in the world around us, he said, "You know, you are really kind of unique in the fact that it doesn't seem like you want your church to grow." I go "I work very hard to try to get us back to the 9 and 11 service time situation. It's not always effective."

He goes, "It's just crazy." I said, "If we stay focused on health, we let God determine the size of the church. Andi would love for him to determine a smaller church for Woodland Hills Family church. 9 and 11, those are the sweet times. But I want you to get that if we will stay focused on spurring one another on to love and good deeds, and if we would stay focused on encouraging one another, serving one another, following scripture in the drivers seat of our lives and of this church, worshiping the Lord together, telling the Lost about Jesus, that this church will be whatever God wants it to be. Let's stay focused on health and not growth.

This morning, we are going to honor those who serve. We are going to yeah, call people to serve, but we want to spend some time thanking those who serve so faithfully. We do honor you for prioritizing gathering. For many of you, this is a priority. You're here every week, but you've not taken the next step. The next step is serving. So, we want to invite you to begin serving.

You saw in the video, if you were here when it ran before the service that we have 1,200 active volunteers at woodland hills. On Sunday, it takes just over 400 to make it happen. You walked in here today, you passed volunteers, you dropped your children off with volunteers, you were served coffee by volunteers. Someone took you in the golf cart... whatever the case may be, there are volunteers. About 400 of them across campus.

You've heard it said that for a church, typically 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work. I'm so grateful that is not true for our church. We have far more than 20% making it happen.

So, you know we talk a lot around here about what happens on Sunday morning, but I want to spend just a moment making you aware of the serving opportunities that are available all throughout the week at our church. it's not just what happens on Sunday but it's all throughout the week.

We have growing student and young adult ministries. They meet on Wednesday nights. They gather here on campus, sometimes off campus to enjoy fellowship, worship, teaching and ministry with their peers and ministry leaders and it takes an amazing team to pull this off. We also offer on-campus classes twice a year in the fall and in the spring, and all of these classes offer hospitality and our greeters, and leaders are faithful to these classes. We have ongoing home groups and mentoring groups like Marriage 911 that are happening year-round. Chris actually just came up to me and said, "I love our church, but I can't tell you how much I love that Saturday morning men's group and what it's doing in his my."

As you can imagine with a campus like ours, we highly value our facilities team. Let's hear it for our Facilities team. They keep our campus clean and safe and up to date. We love them and the volunteers that make it happen. We also have many active volunteers who serve in our church office, helping keep our records up to date and staying in touch with church members, following up with guests.

Our care team meets the needs of people all throughout the week, making hospital visits and hospital calls, praying with people throughout the week. On Thursdays, we have a group called *Prep club*. They come in and prepare all the handouts, take home, and activities in the children's ministries. So, if you are grateful your kids are snacking on Goldfish today, Thank the prep club. They are the hands and feet of this church, and they do whatever it takes to get it done.

Would you help me thank all the volunteers I just mentioned, and it isn't even all of them.

If you are not serving and are interested in plugging in and serving, I want to encourage you this morning to stop by one of the sweet spot booths that are located out in the courtyard. Even if you just have questions, just stop by and ask. We also have a sweet spot class that's coming up on Wednesday, February 5 at 6:30 pm. I want to invite you to be a part of that if you have more questions. But today, we want to honor these guests and I want to do some giveaways. We were told to wear our woodland hills merchandise today since nobody wanted to get their chiefs gear out of the closet. I have an awesome Chief's hoody that has just sat there and sat there.

If you have started serving this church in the last year, would you stand and remain standing.

If you served at Woodland Hills for however long, would you stand and join those that are standing right now so we can honor you and say thank you this morning. Stay standing. Who, over here, want's us to buy their pizza for the game tonight. Thank you for serving.

And now, if you have served this church for more than 20 years, would you stay standing and the rest of you may be seated. More than 20 years. Look around the room. One more giveaway for them. Bart, come running down. Congratulations, Bart.

I actually was laughing. Did anybody see the piece of confetti fall from the ceiling while Paul was leading worship? Years and years ago, we did a series called Love *like confetti*. Courtland, sat up in a space about that wide through all of our gatherings... brought a member of the church up, one of them was Pat Kershaw who is with the Lord now. We just kind of threw a little impromptu party for her and Cortland threw an overwhelming amount of confetti out off the ceiling onto each person. Years later, in the middle of great moment... We thought we got it all, but it is still up there for the rest of the world and it will just floats from time to time. But that when that floated down in from off of Cole, I just said thank you, Courtland for taking the hit and serving that Sunday. I want to say thank you to all.

We asked some people this week where they serve.

Kay said, "'ve been serving Marriage 911 for a year. The Welcome team three years".

Daniyel said "Critter Street, Welcome center, for four years."

Neala, said "'I've been in the office for 11 years."

Nicki said, "With the kids for four years, welcome team 2 years," Sonya said, "Marriage 911 for five years." Chrissy has been doing tech for 4 years," I love what Kevin Allen... Keven Allen over there who plays guitar, he says, "I've been playing in the band for a little while and I love it." He's been playing that guitar at our church for going on 24 years. And I love his humility in sharing that. Josh said, "I've been playing the drums about 16 years. Torry played piano and crew music for 8 years. Cole, I've been with the worship team, which is the best team, for the past 2 years. K has been a greeter for four years. Marsha worship team around 15 years. Lisa with the prep club and hospitality. Karen Yallalee Marriage 911 team for 17 years at our church. Sofy for 10 years between critter street and Wildwoods.

Blake, a Wednesday night student leader. Elly: Critter street 2 years, wildwoods 6 years. Hospitality 2 years. Brad says “I’ve been playing drums with the kids in crew for 20 years.” So, we say thank you to all of you who show up faithfully to serve.

And you kids, last week, and this week have been handed these cards. Just an opportunity, Mom and Dad for you to sit down with them. It’s just to say thank you. for showing up and being faithful in serving in the ministry. We are grateful.

In Romans 12: 10, we read, ***Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*** And that’s what we desire to do every Superbowl of serving Sunday. You are responsible before God for how you use your time, talents, and resources. That’s where we want to move into today. In first Peter 4: ***10 – each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others. As faithful stewards of God’s grace in it’s various forms.***

If you are a believer in Christ Jesus, you have been equipped with a spiritual gift or a gift mix. And that is not about leveraging that to your benefit and blessing, but it’s about leveraging that to the blessing of other people.

When I get asked on the road, from singles, “How do I know I’m ready for marriage.” I say it every single time, “You are ready for marriage when you can get up in the morning and think about someone other than yourself. When you can wake up in the morning thinking about how not your just going to meet your needs, provide for yourself, care for Yourself, have fun and enjoy life all by yourself with a group of friends, but you get up and you are thinking about another person and ultimately more than one other person down the road, that’s how you know you’re ready.

But some of us know... We get into these modes in seasons and stages of life where we get very selfish and we get very entitled and we *think I did my part, I’ve got too much going on, I don’t need to serve.* If you walk in here today or on this campus today or you’re joining us online and you have a moment where you’ve just like, “All week, I’ve been thinking about myself, thinking amount meeting everything I want to do and taking care of myself, let me tell you as we talk today, serving is the antidote to that selfishness and entitlement. To get outside of yourself. We gather and serve.

For some of you that are not serving at our church right now, I want to start by giving you some ways that you can serve even in the gathering. For some of you, I’m going to encourage you to give up your parking space. You’re like, “But I get here early to get it.”

But Ron, who is in full Chiefs gear at the 8:15, he had mobility issues. He's in his 80s I want you to think about, when you pull into express parking, it's not just about getting you express out of here, but it's about freeing up space out here for a guy like Ron. Even when we're parking, we can be thinking about others.

That only applies at the church, though, not at Target or at Walmart. It's every man for himself at a store or restaurant. And you can cut people off; you can beat them to the spot. We're talking about when we act Christian at church... No, you know I'm being sarcastic. But think about how easy that is to think about someone else. In parking. Alright 10:00, here we go. You know this was coming. Some of you are like I knew you were going to go after us for being here at 10:00. Here it is. You can also give up this service, this gathering for someone else. If you have mobility issues, park right out here. That's what we want for you. If you are in here right now because you're serving at another service, I'm not talking to you right now. I'm talking about the sacrifice that it takes to go to 11:45. You don't have to do it right now, but the 11:45 or the 8:15... There are some in here that can make that decision. They can make that sacrifice and say that's how I'm going to serve my church next week. I think that's a pretty light lift. You can also give up your seat. I love nothing more than giving up my seat and saying, here, take it.

This family came and sat down. There are three people sitting in two seats.

I know you get here early to save seats; you have family coming in from out of town, but thinking through maybe going to another venue. What can you do to sacrifice?

This brings us to one of the central teachings on serving that Jesus gives us. Do you remember when James and John came to him and said, let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left in glory. Talking now about authority and power and when the Kingdom is established, you're going to need some high powered guys. Put me here. Put him there.

What did Jesus say to them? You don't know what you are asking. You've got this all wrong. This is all backwards you don't know what you're asking, Jesus said, ***can you drink the cup I drank or be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with.*** And then we read Jesus is very clear. In this moment, the disciples were always creating teaching moments for Jesus, he gathers them together and says, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles Lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. And Jesus says, not so with you. That's not how my kingdom works at all.

As Cole was talking about that first song. *Our God is an awesome God*. When I graduated from college 30 years ago, I went to south Georgia with a church of about 150 to 200 people to work with my best friend. He was 27, I was 22. They hired me as an associate. I get down there and he goes, "Hey I don't know if we said this in the interview, but you need to lead music as well." He said, "We would like to transition the church to contemporary. If you're not familiar with that, that means I'm the sacrificial lamb.

I remember buying a five-disc changer that we had to vote on in a business meeting. I put it in the back, and I put all these split track CD's. One of the very first songs I taught the church was *Our God is an Awesome God*. I remember Brother Bud, in his 80's I had to train him how to hit the play button. I programmed it and he would stand back there. I could see him. For any announcements or anything, Bud was standing back there just looking at the CD Player and I would motion to him and he would press the button and off to the races we would go with our three songs I told Amy... They were so generous to me. I was rich at that church. my starting salary was \$8,000.

Amy and I were talking about it after the first gathering, how much I just loved those moments because it was just serving. It had nothing to do with power, authority, control, money. It had nothing to do with any of that. I do remember how awkward I felt... This church had two big thrones on the stage for the pastor and the associate. This thing went about that tall above my head. big, beautiful throne and we would sit there and I would look over at Austin. Finally, after a couple of months, I look over at Austin and I go, "We look ridiculous up here."

We don't sit on thrones at this church. Thank the Lord. ***He said, not so with you. instead, whoever wants to become great among you, must be your servant. And whoever wants to be the first must be the slave of all and now he's speaking of himself. For even the Son of man, Jesus, did not come to be served... This isn't about building it up for people. But to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.***

When we get to Philippians, what do we read? Have this mind in you that is also in Christ Jesus, who did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but instead, he emptied himself.

If you want to be a servant, empty yourself. What is Jesus teaching here? We don't leverage authority to maintain power and blessings for ourselves. That's not at all it. When someone calls me and wants to lead out in a conversation that they tithe at this church... In 30 years of ministry have never had that conversation go well because they

think they are entitled to something because of their money. In 30 years of ministry, I have to remind them that's not how the kingdom works at all. Keep your money. It doesn't bring you special access into the kingdom. You've seen it happen time and time again with churches, with leaders, with organizations who try to maintain control, power, authority, and image. And what happens is they get to a place and I'm 30 years into ministry leading Woodland Hills Family Church and I go back to those moments at Southside Baptist Church in Lakeland, Georgia, and I go, "Lord, I miss that. Please, I beg you, give us a 9 and 11 service time structure so we can all be servants."

Maintain the heart of a servant. You do not rise in authority. When you are given authority, you are given a great responsibility to leverage that for other people, not yourself. We leverage authority to the benefit and blessing of others. That is how the kingdom works. It's not about keeping control, it's not about keeping image, and it's not about keeping the money. That's not it at all. We leverage all of our authority.

Here's the practical thing you can do this week. When you walk into a room at work and you discover that you are the most influential or powerful or have the most authority in that room, meaning you're the boss, you're the owner, you're the director, you're the manager, whatever it is and you walk in and there is a room full of people, this should be your attitude: pause and ask the question, what do these people need from me? I'm not here to be a benefit and blessing to me, I'm here to be a benefit and blessing to them.

Ask them how can I help you, how can I serve. Walk in with a there you are, not here I am.

And often, when people sign up to serve at our church... I understand this. I'm just going to ask you to kind of consider a mind shift, a change of mind. They'll ask the questions and say, here's when I'm available, this is the ministry I want to work in, and this is how often I want to serve. But I want to encourage you to have the mind set of a servant today and ask some different questions.

How about if you ask, where do you need me? We shared this last week. We teach this to our kids. Take any job until the perfect job comes along. I know what my spiritual gifts are, what my heart motivation and abilities, personality and experience are. I want to give the bulk of my time to that because I believe that's what God has called me to do, but there are plenty of times I have to serve places and do things I don't really want to do, but this is what we all know a servant does. You serve in areas that aren't necessarily 100% in line with what you want. It may be down the road. Ask the question Where do you need me? How often do you need me?

This is a big one. When should I be there? 7:45. I'd encourage you to get there at 7:40. Many of you grew up with five minutes early is on time. On time is late.

The last question is how long do you need me?

Now, it's a big question people ask. We ask people... if you are brand new to our church, we don't want you to jump in and start serving today, we want you to get to know us. We want to get to know you. But seriously some people move here to the Ozarks they come to church and then the next week they want to be serving. Give it some time. Give it six months. Some of you have been here six years. It's time to serve. You gather, you're faithful to the gathering, but you're not serving and we want to encourage you to step up into that position of serving.

Change your mindset.

Serve in areas of need

Be flexible with the time you serve. Be dependable and show up on time.

If you are new to this series, I've been ending each message with a letter to my children. My kids are now in their 20's. My son is getting married in May, so we are going to be full on empty nesters. So, this is kind of me looking back on my parenting, but still I believe parenting is a journey from control to influence, so these letters feel far more like influence. I want to encourage you throughout this series to do the same thing. We've been encouraging you to put together a family constitution but write these letters out, have them ready for that day your kids are reading when you're no longer here.

I told you last week that I had some attitude in the letter and it needed a lot of editing. The first drafts of this letter Serve the Local Church, sounded a little like my resignation. So, I had to reword it several times. You're going to still get the tone of bring out the sheet cake. After this.

To my kids.

You've been part of Woodland Hills your entire life. You now serve in classrooms you grew up in. you've been part of every high and every low. You've seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. You've gone through every hard season with your Mom and me. and you've taken so many hits because I'm your dad and pastor. I've been fiercely protective of you, but I couldn't shield you from every attack. Through it all, our family still loves,

supports, and serves Woodland Hills. Why? It's because we believe that Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. And because we are the church, we submit to Christ. Christ loves the church and he gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with the water through The Word. And to present her to himself as a radiant bride without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. But holy and blameless.

We will never give up on the Local church because he died for us and has called us to serve his bride. Jesus told Peter, "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it. Jesus is still building his church and it will endure until the end. Pastors, leaders, organization may fail you, but the church will still be built.

I've been your dad and pastor your entire life. I'll always be your dad, but I won't always be your pastor. You'll be led by someone else someday. Serve the church at the church with the same love and enthusiasm that you do now. Have confidence in your leaders. Submit to their authority. Do this so that their work will be a joy and not a burden. I hope to serve alongside you in this church until the Lord calls me home.. The church is full of imperfect people. They will let you down. They will hurt your feelings. They will waiver in their commitments to serve. Don't let that sway you in your walk with "Christ or your service to this church. stay faithful. When people hurt you, take responsibility for your healing. Don't carry it. blaming church hurt for a bad attitude is a bad excuse. Don't give up. Don't quit. You know my heart on this. Never settle for just attending church. you may have seasons where you need a break so take one. But use it to be refreshed, renewed and replenished for you next assignment. I love you and I pray that you will always love, support, and serve the local church.

Father, we are grateful for the work you continue to do at Woodland Hills. May we focus on health and leave all the growth to you. You filled this church the way you saw fit. Give us wisdom and discernment as leaders. Help no one in this church to ever leverage authority, to leverage what we've been given to the blessing of ourselves, but to the blessing of other people, to the benefit of other people.

May this be our heart in everything we do.

For the one who has served faithfully this church for years and years and years, I am grateful and I thank you for them. For the one considering serving, guide them, direct them into a place of service here that fills them and grows them and builds relationships throughout this church and for the one that walks in here today full of selfishness and

entitlement because they have never known or relied on the love that you have for them, that today would be the day they repent of their sins, confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they will be saved.

I pray many turn to Christ today for salvation. Thank you for your continued work here
We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus everyone agreed and said... Amen