

Dear Son
Part Nine – Caring for Those Who Lead

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Next week, we are planning a special time of the Lord's Supper here at Woodland Hills. I encourage you to go home this afternoon and go to YouTube and type in the words *new again*. It will pop a video up that is sung by Brad Paisley and Sara Evans. Brad sings the part of Jesus and Sara Evans sings the part of Mary. It's a video of The Passion; it's about 6 ½ minutes long.

Corynn came in last night and saw me watching it and said "Dad, what are you looking at?" I explained it to her (she's seven) and then I looked at Amy and said, "I'm going to go ahead and show it to her." So the music started playing with Jesus in the garden. You see that scene. You see Jesus being betrayed. You see that scene. In like the third or fourth scene, is the crown of thorns coming upon Jesus head and the guards pushing it in and blood streaming down. At that scene, Corynn immediately covered her eyes and did what you usually do; she peeked through, but she couldn't take it. She said, "Turn it off, Dad. Turn it off, turn it off."

We've been praying this new prayer. I've been challenged by a man named Samuel Rodriguez, a pastor out of California. Every day, when we pull into Corynn's school, we pray over her. Last year it was Ephesians 6 and praying the armor of God over her. This year it's even simpler than that. We are praying with her before she goes into school. We pray: "Dear Jesus, cover her in your blood, protect her from evil and guard her heart." And we pray for Corynn to really begin to understand what the blood of Jesus had done for us. A lot of us sing those songs and we completely forget that it truly does give us the power and the victory over death, hell, and the grave.

I want to ask everybody to bow your heads where you are at and if you are having a marriage problem, a family problem, a work problem, or you want to come to know Jesus for the first time in your life... Whatever the situation, there are believers in here today who need to be reminded of this powerful truth and they need to be covered in the blood. They need to be reminded of the blood and they need to pray the name of Jesus today.

Today, if it's your marriage, or your family or your child that has gone off the deep end, I'm going to ask you to have the courage to stand up right now where you are at. All I want you to do when you stand is just say the name Jesus. We are going to pray the same prayer as a church family. Jesus, cover them in your blood, protect them from evil, and guard their hearts.

Father, in the name of Jesus, in the service today, as we come to worship the name of Jesus, as we come to lift up his name, as we come to consider the cross, the thorns, the pain, the suffering, may we be reminded that by his stripes, we have been healed. For each person standing, whatever the situation, be it their marriage, their family, their children, their work, their mom, their dad, their brother, their

sister, cover them in your blood, protect them from evil and guard their hearts. We pray that you would encourage them today and that today, when they leave here, the blood, the cross, and the name of Jesus would be on their lips. We surround them as a church family to bless them and to encourage them as well. And it's in the name of Jesus that everyone in here said... Amen.

We want to welcome you all back from summer. How many of you checked kids in this week? Boy that's a quiet bunch. What I didn't tell you was after I said that prayer for the first time on Thursday, I went yeaaaaah! And send her off to school. This is a good time. I know many of you are headed back to school and it is a good year. We are glad you are here at Woodland Hills.

Part of our worship service every week is these cow milking buckets. As they come around it's where we give our tithes and offering. Again, thank you for your generous giving, Woodland Hills. Again, we are working in and for Haiti. We have more videos we are working on right now and editing that we look forward to getting into the service for you to see. We are doing a lot of work in Haiti, planning the trips through out this year and next, so we want to again encourage you to give to support the ministries of this church.

Today is an interesting back to school text. If you have your Bibles, turn to 1 Timothy 5; we are going to start in Verse 17. If you are new to Woodland Hills or coming back after the summer... For some of you I see today, you are back after about eight or nine months, welcome. We're glad you're here and no, you're not a guest, so start giving. We went through Ephesians this spring, verse by verse. We're going through 1 Timothy, verse by verse and we are going to be done here in two weeks with 1 Timothy. Then we are going to march right into 2 Timothy, verse by verse. Then we plan on going through the teachings of Christ starting in late October.

One of the nice things about going through a book, verse by verse, is you can't get mad at me for picking the text. Today is no different. This text is here. Often, in a Sunday morning service in larger churches, you are never going to hear this text taught because the whole point of this text is how you are supposed to take care of me. Isn't that wonderful? A whole morning of how the church needs to take care of Ted and Ted. But we are going to have a broader application than that. You're like "Boy I got up early for the first service for this?"

This is about how to care for your leaders. We've been looking in 1 Timothy... again, if you are just now tuning in to this series, it's a letter written by an old pastor to a younger pastor. Again, if you any sort of modern day woman, feminist bent, you hate this book with a passion. Some of you have admitted it to me. It has worn you out because the beliefs in your heart growing up and through all of your life are opposite of what we've looked at in 1 Timothy 2, 3 and, last week, 1 Timothy 5.

By the way, last week in the second service I made this offer... we didn't make it in the first service; I forgot to. But this is in accordance with 1 Timothy 5. If you are a single man in here and you will start dating a single mom at Woodland Hills Family Church, we will pay for your first date. And you can make it a doozy; I'm talking Blue Olive; I'm talking do it up right. At the end of last week's service... Again, we've covered everything from the roles of men and women in the church; we've covered elders and deacons.

1 Timothy 3 was the qualifications and my responsibility, Ted's responsibility, the responsibility of the seven elders of Woodland Hills to you. Now, today, it's going to flip; it's your responsibility to the leaders of the church.

After last week, I had a guy in this service come up to me. We talked about single moms in the church and how Paul's solution was not to put them on the list and start taking care of them automatically; they need to consider dating and marrying another guy in the church. Again, some of you guys are not listening. You are being disobedient. You better start asking out ladies in this church or we will hurt you. We are pro-marriage, pro-dating and we believe it's important. A guy came up to me last week and he's in this service today and it was a great. He brought the message home and I just wanted to share his story with you.

He said, "During the whole message in 1 Timothy 5 this morning, I thought about my stepdad, who really became my dad. He married my mom and adopted the seven of us as his own." Let me tell you, that's a man. There is no better way to take care of widows and orphans in the church than to marry one and to adopt her children. Some of you are still thinking we are turning into a freaky cult. We're not. We are just going through this book.

Last week, we looked at the family and how the family operates as a church. We looked at a special group within the family called the widows and how we take care of them. We looked at benevolence and how we don't fund sin in the church.

Today, we are going to look at who is called to lead the family. As we jump into this text, I just want to share with you because Branson has a lot of different groups of people who call themselves churches. One of the key elements of a church is elders. Churches are lead by elders. In a culture and in a generation that doesn't like the idea of leadership... I get it; there are all sorts of reasons why we don't like leadership. There are bad leaders, there are corrupt leaders, there are leaders who are in ministry for wrong motives and the wrong reasons. I understand all the reasons why we should turn away from leadership, but, none the less, leaders are called to lead the church. Jesus is our senior pastor, he's our senior shepherd. But he has put men into the position of elders to be followed by the church.

Now some of you have friends in this town who attend home churches. Is there anything wrong with home churches? No. Churches come in all different shapes and sizes. But there are a lot of home churches in our town that are really more like fellowships because they don't have elders, they don't have anybody leading and they don't have anybody carrying authority within that church. There are a lot of churches in our town that are really just worship services that people attend on Sunday morning. I really want to challenge you, as we go through this morning's text, to consider your heart towards leadership in general and understand we all have a bent to rebel against authority; it's in us.

So today, we are going to look at the role of elders in the church and we are going to look at leaders. Some of you need to make a broader application here even to the leadership that has been placed in your life, maybe at the workplace, as we look at what the leader needs from the people that he is leading.

Understand, I have a little bit of angst on the first Sunday after school starts, which is usually a pretty big Sunday in the church, to be talking to you about how much you should pay me. It's a little odd for a back to school sermon. But, thankfully, we are going through this verse by verse and we are not going to neglect it.

1. Your leaders, your pastors, need respect.

You have to solute the office of elders, even when you've seen bad examples. ¹²***The elders who direct the affairs of the church well...*** Circle the word *well*. We recognize that there are pastors, there are leaders, and there are elders who do not represent the name of Jesus well. We understand that. We understand there are pastors who are scratch golfers and I have a problem with that. It's because they may spend more time hobbying and relaxing... Some of you are writing that down. That was a joke; don't take that too seriously. But there are some pastors who hobby and relax and hang out. I'll tell you; it's not that easy to do if you are going to do the work of an elder well. To do the work of an elder well takes a lot of time.

I remember when we started Woodland Hills, Amy and I didn't have a family. It was just the two of us; we didn't have kids. We were able to put 80 to 90 hours a week in. If you called the church office, I would answer. Usually you were interrupting me from finishing up the bulletin. We were the ones going and buying the equipment at Target and Best Buy and filling the trailer and unpacking it and packing it each week. Then we started to have a family.

Between doing the work of the church and doing the work that the family requires, I don't have time to do a lot of hobbies. I don't have time to do a lot of hang out time. I know many of you are like "Hey, we want you to come over for dinner." We would love to, but we just don't have time; there is so much going on. I'd love to spend time with those at our church who behave well, but I'm too busy spending time with the people who don't. If some of you guys would start working and providing for your family, I might be able to go and hang out at Pat's house for a nice meal but sorry, Pat, we have people who sin in this church.

You should hear people when they ask us to come over for dinner and I say "Well what's going on in your life?" When I find out everything is good, I can't come over. It's because there are people who are wicked and that's where the work of elder comes in. We are going to see it in the last verse this morning. It's a lot of work. Some of you need to begin respecting that work in the role of an elder.

I'm just going to tell this one story on somebody. It's a current case. I wanted to find the most current case of Woodland Hills. Two of the most fantastic elders we have... We don't rank them, but these guys are just retired and they have a little more time than the other elders. Jim Sedlacek and Bill Rogers. These guys are the model elders for the world in my opinion. I always give them the sheep caught in the thicket. When I get an email of two members of our church going at it, I send it to them and they play the good cop/bad cop thing. You guess which one is which.

Bill tells me these stories. Frankly, some of you aren't respecting their leadership in the church; I'm just going to say it. Bill actually sent... again, we are getting involved in the lives of the people in our church. He says to them, "Hey, I want to sit down with the two of you..." It was two people going at it in our church; I mean lawsuits and everything. He goes, "I want to sit down with you." He gets an email back saying "It's none of your business."

Wow! Again, we will hurt you if you don't start submitting to the authority. Again, we don't wake up in the morning trying to figure out things to do here. We don't wake up and go "Hmmm, got nothing going on today; what should we do?" We have plenty to do. We have studying and preparing and teaching and working with people who are a mess. Here's what we need from the congregation: you need to look at the leaders in this church, the elders, and you need to give them respect.

...are worthy of double honor... It's speaking here of that being esteemed as valuable, that role in your life is important. Young people who are considering bolting from organized church to go start their own little house church... Look at me; I was belittling when I said "little." I did not mean to say that. But you want to start a church? That's great, so long as you have authority because some people want to leave the church because they don't want authority.

We see this with weddings all the time. People come in and say "We want to get married." Well let's start going through what we call the Cs here: character, chemistry, competency, and calling. We rarely ever get through character without realizing you guys have some things to work on in your character. Here's what we get. "We'll find another pastor." And they continue to go here. I'm just shocked by that.

Some of you need to understand that authority is there for your good, not to hurt you. It's the same reason you have parents. Some of you want to rebel against your parents. Mom and Dad are an authority in your life, placed there by God. The church, as a family, is led by elders and we need to give them that respect. *...especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.* So you all love Ted Burden, but he doesn't often stick his neck out there as much as I do and tell you to go start dating single moms.

I love when people come into the office for premarital counseling and their choice is Ted Burden or Ted Cunningham and they want to talk to Ted Burden. You do that because you think he's going to give you a pass. Ted will call me with a situation... I'll go "No, we don't do that" and he wants to give them back to me. So Jim I pick on you with good cop/bad cop, but it's good cop/bad cop with Ted and me also. When you are in a public teaching capacity, you tend to stick your neck out there.

Many of you get this in your place of work. I've loved watching so many of my friends in this church get a promotion at work to become a leader at a greater capacity. I just smile and start to get the chuckles because you are all excited about maybe the pay increase, but I am just thinking about how you're going to have the absolute crud beat out of you. The more you take on in leadership, the larger the target grows on your back and people take shots. People enjoy going after the pastor. They enjoy going after anybody who exercises authority over them. He says give honor to the person who is preaching and teaching.

You are going to see a lot of this today and go “Is Ted going after us? He’s going to put the squeeze on us in a minute for a raise.” No. What I want to say to you is thank you. As a church, you’ve allowed me to become a pastor. Really I’ve been a mess a lot of the time in ministry. Many of you are like “That is for dang sure.” But so many of you are so encouraging.

I talk about Pat all the time. Pat is as straight forward as they come, but one of the most encouraging ladies in this church. We have encouraging people who give respect to that. Listen, Pat has been a believer for 20 years longer than I’ve been alive. She comes in here week after week after week and listens to me. I really don’t give her anything new. She’s heard it all at least 10 times in her century upon this earth.

Many of you go in and out of churches. I’m excited about this message today and really looking at 1 Timothy 5 in an honest way because I know for the majority of people in here, almost all of you, you will have another pastor at some point in your life. If God were to call me to do something different or if you were to be called to moved to Montana... By the way, Montana is a really easy state to get in and out of on flights. Not. Many of you are going to have other pastors; you are going to have other leaders in your life. I hope you take the message today and begin to develop good beliefs of how to take care of your leaders.

Here’s what Hebrews 13: 17 says if you want to take care of your leaders. ***Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.*** I give an account for every word I say up here. I give an account for the beliefs and the theology and the doctrine and the teachings that come from this pulpit. It says ***Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*** I can say that for the last three years at Woodland Hills, we’ve experienced a wonderful season of peace, so don’t screw that up. It’s been so nice.

Some of you have it in your spirit to rebel at... If an elder of this church ever sends you an email saying “Talk to so and so; they’ve got some frustration with you” and it’s a business thing you need to work out, don’t tell them it’s none of their business. Do you know what you need to do? You need to first praise your father in heaven that somebody cares enough to make that phone call. You need to thank the Lord that somebody wants to help you. Here’s the thing. We don’t charge for our services. That mediation is free, but we want to help you. Give respect to that position of leadership.

Leading the church well; what does that mean? Make sure that the church is being taught well, loved well, money is well spent. I just want you to know that with the leaders and the elders we have in place over money, you can trust that here. These guys can squeeze a dime like you have never seen. They put the squeeze on the staff all the time.

People are coming to know Jesus in this church, marriages are being fixed and hopefully we are getting more hookups here as well. People are having babies and in that order: marriages and babies. All we ask as a church is that we learn how to respect authority and we learn how to respect the elders.

2. Your leaders need a paycheck.

¹⁸**For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox..."** What great word picture for what pastors do. It doesn't say the fawn; it doesn't say the nice little bird that comes in and chirps a little bit on Sunday morning; it's an ox, meaning we are a big hairy beast that puts on a yoke and starts working the field. He uses Deuteronomy 25: 4 where the Lord called the practice of putting an ox in the field, making him work the field and then when the field grows, withholding food from the one who made the field grow... The Lord calls that practice wicked; you don't do that.

He says if a guy is working well and producing and providing... Again, there are a lot of different ways of paying a staff member, but again I want to say thank you, Woodland Hills. We are not under paid here at this church. We are not over paid. We don't have staff that's running out looking for the next big signing bonus. Some of you are like "They do signing bonuses at church?" You have no idea. I get pretty frustrated with the church being treated like a business, but it is. Pastors are recruited for other churches like CEOs are recruited for Fortune 500 companies. I can share stories with you of pastors who have received \$100,000.00 signing bonuses to go take a church. As soon as I get that offer, I will be saying so long, Woodland Hills. I love you, but boy I got a hundred thousand reasons that came in the mail this week. No, I'm kidding. That's a horrible leader.

"Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain..." He is saying if a guy is working hard. Then he quotes Jesus. **...and "The worker deserves his wages."** Pay him according to the work he is doing. We do that at this church and the elders are very conscious of that with our staff to make sure... If it's a part time staff member, we don't work them like an ox or like a full time staff member or if we do, we pay them accordingly. I have to be honest with you.

The staff members of this church are very qualified. You need to know that and they get job offers a lot. One of the reasons I don't look at a lot of them is this right here. I love this. I know I'm called to this and I know that replicating this is not all that easy. The work that has gone in here... Many of the staff members here have been oxen.

I don't like to look at Denise Bevins like an ox, but she has plowed fields in this church. She has worked with many of you. Ted Burden has plowed fields at this church. He's had the target on his back enlarged and people have taken shots at him. Amy Cunningham has plowed fields at this church. Stephanie Watson, Brenda Pannell, Angela Jennings, John Meyers... I can go through our staff and go we have a staff that has worked very hard. You don't make it on our staff all that long if you are lazy because the work is so hard. It says don't muzzle the ox. If the church begins to see growth, you need to reward the oxen that are in the field, producing that growth and being a part of it.

Let me give you some statistics here that may shock some of you. The average congregation in the United States of America has 90 people. The average size of the church in the United States is 90 people with a budget of about \$115,000.00 and the average pastor salary in America is \$40,000.00. Once the congregation hits 250, the pastor goes from about \$40,000.00 to \$60,000.00. Woodland Hills is in the top 2% size wise of churches in the United States. Two percent of churches have 800 or greater people in weekend attendance.

We have a budget this year that will be over \$1,000,000.00. Again you're thinking the squeeze is coming. You think I'm going to ask for something for the staff. I'm telling you thank you. You've blessed us; you take good care of us. Some of you want me to put all the salaries of the staff on the screen. No. That's because people make for horrible rumors. But it says your leaders need a paycheck.

Some of you have served in church leadership positions and you thought it was your calling of the Lord to keep the church staff poor because that was a way of keeping them humble. Obey your Bible and do not muzzle the ox. You need to pay them well. You need to bless the socks off of them. Ministry leaders here... Mike be taking notes. You've got ministry leaders in your ministry. Kim is like, yes stay on this point for just a little longer, Ted. Pat knows this, she's been in ministry. A worker deserves his wages.

So if you ever go and leave this church and become an elder at another church... We actually ask this question before you become an elder at Woodland Hills. What's your position of the elder taking care of the staff? People will respond with a lot of different answers. One guy in this church... I don't know if he's in this service... who they called a pastor and this guy came in and goes "I am called; this is the church I'm supposed to be at." Then they told him what he would be making and he goes... You could just see it happen in the room; the calling just kind of went away.

I go, "You blame him, but what did you offer him, \$10,000.00? He can't do the work of ministry because he is constantly thinking of ways to feed his family? That's not evil. It's a guy wanting to take care of his family." "Oh that pastor is wicked; he wants to put braces on his children's teeth." No. He has a desire to take care of his family.

How do you pay a pastor? There are a lot of different variables that people use. How long has the guy served? What's the size of the church? The cost of living. Again, Woodland Hills, take another check mark on the respect, take a check mark on the paycheck, and take a check mark... Thank you very much. Now here's one that I have really looked forward to.

3. Your leaders need protection.

¹⁹***Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.*** I have no idea what this text is talking about. So there is a difference between hearsay and accusation. I've seen this happen... Oh my golly, if you want to talk about something that happens in Branson on a regular basis? I've had very few accusation ever brought against me, but a lot of gossip and a lot of rumors.

You sit down at a table with a guy and he says, "I hear you're doing this." You're thinking "Wow, I heard just that same thing yesterday from a guy and it was almost verbatim." That's not an accusation. Here's the key here, an accusation has a witness. "I saw the pastor go into the hotel room with a woman who wasn't his wife." That's an accusation. An accusation is a witness to a crime. Don't bring your gossip about a pastor to people in the church. Don't bring your slander and your tongue.

Three years ago, I was accused of dealing with something with money. We had five people in the room when we discussed this issue about money. Don't let your mind go crazy places; there was no crime committed. One guy heard one thing and four guys heard something completely different, but that one accusation turned into a hundred people and gossip and rumors and slander. The elders of the church came to me and here was their solution for Ted: "Shut your mouth. Don't say a word; don't try to argue this; don't try to refute it."

I had people bringing manila envelopes and putting them in my mailbox at home. You know... anonymous letters. "Ted Cunningham, how dare you. You are the most wicked man on earth for doing this, that and the other." I would open the mailbox and I would slowly reach in and pull out the manila envelop. I'd go "Amy, open this." Once we knew there was no Zanthrex, I would read it. That's not an accusation; that's hearsay. People enjoy taking shots... let's just say it. People get ticked off at pastors. They get hacked at them. People like to talk about pastors.

Here's what you need to hear from me. I'm not perfect, I get that, but I'm qualified. The elders of this church make sure that I'm qualified. The elders of this church keep me in check. I'm the youngest of seven elders. We have a lot of old elders at this church. They are near death elders, but they hold me to account. You need to know that everything is on the table for them: my finances, my relationship with Amy, how I lead this church, what I speak on, what I don't speak on, and the theology of this church. Just I am asking you to submit to and respect the authority of elders and pastors; I have to learn to do that. But be careful in a town like this to just not listen to hearsay and rumors and gossip. Don't even consider it unless multiple people have seen the action and call it because that's the next point.

4. Leaders need accountability.

There are going to be elders and pastors who sin and they need to be dealt with. ***20Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly...*** In other words, public leaders need public discipline when they sin. We live in an age that says when somebody does something wrong, let's keep it as quiet as possible. One of the reasons we do that is because we don't want it to affect the growth of the church. Tough noogy is what the Greek says. We have to discipline publicly. We've blown it a few times in this church. We deal with the sin of an individual in a way that isn't as the scripture calls us to. We need to rebuke such a person publicly.

I look back over times in ministry over the last eight and a half years in Branson and I see the times I blew it. We should have rebuked publicly and it would have saved a lot of heartache; it would have saved a lot of frustration and angst and anger. He says ***20Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly so that the others may take warning. 21I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angel...*** In other words, when a public leader, who professes Christ and teaches this book, sins, it brings the reputation of Jesus and the reputation of the Bible down. He says that's why it needs to be done before everyone. ***...to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism.***

Does this ever happen in the church? Absolutely. If the pastor is producing well and people come to the church because of the speaking... You see this in churches all the time. The church has grown because this pastor has been there 15 or 20 years. We don't want to rebuke him publicly because we got a four

million dollar budget we have to maintain. He says don't show favoritism in this. With the pastors who knock it out of the park or the pastors of the small Baptist church in Beloit, WI, don't show favoritism. It's across the board. If a pastor sins, if an elder sins, you let that be known publicly.

One of the mistakes Chuck Swindoll made in ministry, that he is very open about, is they had a season, at the church he was at in California, where multiple pastors and leaders of his church started failing in their marriages and cheating on their wives, which is a big issue among church leaders. Church leaders keeping their pants on is a problem. He says we dealt with it internally and we never did it openly and we saw it just keep going.

One of the greatest things about rebuking sin publically is that it takes warning for all of us. If you bring a pastor up who has committed an affair and you say "Hey listen this guy cheated on his wife. We love him, we are going to restore him, and we are going to walk through this with him..." I know many pastors who have done that well.

There's a great story out of First Baptist Forsyth. They've done this in years past. They have restored leaders back to ministry, but you have to do it publically because some of you right now are talking on line to a woman you are considering having an affair with. You take notice to that and you go home and you cut that off at the level of just talking. Some of you will end that affair when sin is dealt with publically. Just so you know, that day... I pray it never comes because I pray the blood over myself and protection over myself. If I ever fail, if I ever sin, it is now on record, it's on podcast, you have it. The elders are to bring me up or Ted Burden or anybody and deal with it in front of all of you. There are no secrets and shadows when it comes to public leadership. As public as our ministry is out there, so is the discipline in which we need to be dealt with.

5. Your leaders need a time of testing.

We saw this in 1 Timothy 3. You don't put in new converts because they can be filled with pride and filled with arrogance. ***22Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.*** Meaning if you put a guy in too early, you are going to have problems.

Dr. Hayter, one of the elders at our church... Carson falls right on the line of kindergarten. As parent, we just didn't know what to do. Dr. Hayter said this: "Ted, I've never seen a kid start too late, but I've seen way too many kids start too early." I thought that was good advice and that is good advice for leadership in the church as well. I don't think you can put a leader into a position like elder too late. I know some churches that have a testing period of four and five years. I know churches that don't pay you as a pastor or an elder until you have volunteered in that church for five years. They want to know you are being tested.

It says don't be quick... the laying on of hands; we saw that in 1 Timothy 4. The elders don't impart the gift of leadership into a young man... like when Paul told Timothy not to neglect the gift that was given him by the laying on of hands. It's a commissioning. It's recognition of what the Lord has called a person to do.

I've been challenging the young guys in this church to step up and start dating and start marrying and start marrying single moms. You need to be challenged in this book as well to start aspiring to positions of leadership. We need guys preparing to be elders. We need them sitting under existing elders and preparing to become elders so that when our elders start dying, we have people to replace them with. That's a very important part of leadership, but don't be too quick about putting them in.

6. Your leaders need merlot.

If there has been one verse fundamentalists would like to take out of the Bible all together, it's Verse 23. They hate this verse being in there because they get tired of trying to explain it away. But here's what it says. ²³**Stop drinking only water, and use a little... circle the word little ...wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.** You have ulcers because you are dealing with people. This is where we get the song *God is Great, Beer is Good, People are Crazy*. This is the exact same word for wine that was in 1 Timothy 3.

Now listen... I read commentaries on this and it cracks me up. There are twenty and twenty-first century commentaries that want to explain this verse away and it is a joke. It cracks me up. John MacArthur... this is the only verse I've ever read in a commentary of his where he gets liberal and tries to explain it away as Ocean Spray cranapple grape juice. I don't think in 1 Timothy 3 when it says don't indulge in much wine, it is saying don't drink too much grape juice. Remember we saw that; it says don't indulge in much wine because if you are prone to drinking too much, people will make you drunk every night. They will drive you insane and you will go home and you will have to take the edge off by drinking and consuming much alcohol.

Some of you asked last week why I pay \$50.00 for my million dollar life insurance policy rather than like \$30.00. It's because I'm a heavy smoker and I drink a lot. That's not true. Some of you are thinking you really have stuff on me. But you will notice the term. It's the same thing he said in 1 Timothy 3. It says don't indulge in this.

There are a lot of reasons many of you abstain from drinking all together. Let me give you a few of them. Some of you will not drink an ounce of alcohol because of your family history. Your dad was an alcoholic, your mom was an alcoholic, you had uncles who were alcoholics and you saw abuse in your family. Many staff members have this type of family history and they abstain altogether. And we definitely honor that.

Some of you abstain because of age. If you are 18 years old and drink, you are sinning; you're breaking the law. My pastoral counsel to you is stop it. Some of you don't drink because of the workplace. You work for a ministry or an organization that says you have to abstain 100%. We believe in authority in this church. You follow that authority or you get a different job. Some of you abstain because of conscience. Your conscience won't allow you to drink because of what you were raised in.

Some of you abstain because you are Baptist and that's okay. Some of you abstain because you don't want to be a stumbling block. We totally get it. Some of you abstain because you have an alcoholic past and you can't drink any at all. There are a lot of reasons to abstain.

All I ask is that you don't use the Bible as one of your reasons. That's a bad, bad choice. You can abstain because of conscience, but not because of the Bible. This is one of my favorite verses in the entire Bible. Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 – **Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do... Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all [your miserable days].** That is the scripture. Can a godly man go out and work hard all day long, come home and enjoy a nice meal with his family, drink a little wine with his wife, make love to his wife, go to sleep, get up the next day and do it all over again? Absolutely because now God favors what you do.

I said this in 1 Timothy 3 and I need to say it again. I am limiting everybody here to two bottles a week. People will ask me... I still can't get over you, Woodland Hills; you crack me up. Some of you asked if that was per family or per person. Don't be ridiculous; it's per person. You get about four glasses in two bottles. But I'm telling you that fundamentalists just don't like this verse. Paul was saying that Timothy was dealing with a lot of leadership issues in the church and that it was okay for him to go home... He said Timothy was abstaining for no reason. He says go home and drink a little wine for your ulcers or your medical issues, whatever the case may be. But the wine is one of the Bible's primary metaphors: vine, branch, harvest... Your leaders need merlot.

6. Your leaders need to call out sin in your life.

Think about all of this coming up to what you need to do for leaders and now the key is you need to allow leaders to speak into your life. You need to allow this. ²⁴**The sins of some men are obvious...** I like that part because this is what it is saying. If you see them walking up to you, their sin is just so obvious. It rests on them is what he is trying to explain. ...**reaching the place of judgment ahead of them...** Meaning their sin is so obvious and so blatant; they are open about it. We have those people at Woodland Hills that they are basically telling the elders "You are not going to tell me what to do. This is how I'm going to live." Their sins are obvious.

But there is another group of people. It says ...**the sins of others trail behind them.** There are some of you that your sins have not caught up to you yet. You are not divorced yet. You are not in prison yet. You are not seeing your kids in prison yet. But your sins are trailing behind you and it's time for your wake up call. You need to change and you need to change right now. You need to stop the destructive behavior and the destructive patterns in your life.

That's why God gives us leaders. He gives us elders in the church to point that out and to tell us "Hey, we see the path you are headed on" and it's the exact same thing parents do with kids. "This is a path that will destroy you and destroy your life." Make sure, for those who are in here with sins trailing behind them, that today you do business with the Lord.

For some of you who are living in the arrogance of your sin, your sin is obvious, and you are not going to repent. You are living with that woman and you've heard us time and time again. You've been going here for years and you refuse to get right with God and do business about your sexual sin. Your sins are obvious; they are resting upon you. You need to confess that to the Lord right now and you need to change that about you. You need to be covered in his blood. You need to repent this morning. Hear an elder of the church telling you that.

It's time to grow up. It's time to look at the Lord and say "You know what? I've been running from you for a long time; I've been snubbing the leadership and it's time I heed their words this morning because they love me, they care for me, they watch over me."

²⁵***In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.*** People will see your changed life. That's what I love about coming to the Table Rock Freedom Center graduations. Sundi Jo was up here a couple of weeks ago, on a Saturday, telling her story. She checked in a year ago to the Table Rock Freedom Center. You see the transformation on them. One is that Sundi Jo has lost 145 pounds in the last year. She tells the story of her life and she tells a story of rebellion. Every story of salvation has a story of rebellion, a story of "I didn't want to listen to anybody."

Sundi Jo stood up and talked about one of our elders, Ted Burden, one of our pastors who stepped in. He showed up at the front door and didn't give her an option. He said "We're checking you in." I just want to say this to Woodland Hills. I think it's okay to say this. But you all paid for that year at the Table Rock Freedom Center for Sundi Jo. You all, out of benevolence, said we are going to help this young lady. And she is a miracle of our Lord. Her sins were obvious and she knows that, but what's more obvious now are her good deeds. Every now and then we get a picture of that in the church.

I sit back and I listen as I watch this girl, whose less than half the woman she was a year ago, literally, talk about her love for the Lord, talk about her church family and friends who surrounded her and loved her, and I'm reminded that leadership is worth it. But all the garbage that goes on, the slander, the gossip, the frustration, the people going "Who do you think you are? Shut your mouth and get out of my life." Every now and then, somebody heeds it. Every now and then, somebody says I'm done living this way.

Ted Burden had other things to do that day when he showed up at Sundi Jo's front door. There have been plenty of doors that Ted Burden has shown up at to help somebody and they refused it. I just sat back and said Lord, thank you for the responsibility Sundi Jo took in going. She went kicking and screaming; she didn't want to do it. But then she quickly took her hatred off of us and turned it on to Kim Sanders because Kim is a leader and she started taking that.

Let me just share this. Leaders, it's worth it. Don't you quit being a leader because people don't listen. Don't you quit being a leader because people will slander you and run you into the mud. Don't quit being a leader of one position because another position is offering you a whole lot more money. Ted... pay attention. Don't you quit. You keep moving forward, you keep leading people because good deeds are just as obvious and even those that are not cannot be hidden; it shines through

Father, in the name of Jesus, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this book that has challenged us in how we lead this church, challenges us in what we are called to do as a family. You've given us leaders. I pray for Doug and Mike and Bill and Jim and Gary and Doug as they continue to lead and be elders here that they would lead their families well, they would manage their homes well.

Thank you for our staff: Angela, Brenda, Stephanie, Ted, Denise, Pam, Amy, John, all of those who are serving here faithfully, week in and week out. Would you bless them this week? Would you encourage

this congregation to find ways to respect the authority that is placed over them? Many are going to leave this church and move to other cities and other parts of the county. I pray that they would be a blessing wherever they go for the rest of their life as they respect and submit to the authority that you have placed in the church.

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