

Message: Valleys and the Second Mountain

Sermon Series: Second Mountain

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Exodus 3:1-12

The late evangelist, Billy Graham, had this quote: *“Mountaintops are for views and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys.”* Every person in the Bible had difficult times. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Hannah, David, Solomon, Elijah, Job, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, Joseph and Mary, Peter, Paul and Jesus all suffered. Yet, their stories point to the fact that our adversity can make us strong and resilient.

In the chapter on “The Valley” in “The 2nd Mountain” (p. 26-37), Brooks explains how these struggles can move us beyond ourselves. Suffering can separate the trivial and insignificant from what is ultimately important. A proper response to suffering can teach us gratitude, generosity and compassion.

The chapter on “The Wilderness” (p. 38-43) is about Moses. He illustrates someone who lived on “The First Mountain” of success, was kicked to the curb and found himself in the valley (wilderness). Then he found the second mountain of significance. He, like Jonah, was a reluctant missionary.

The chapter on “The Committed Life” (p. 52-59) reminds us of one of the most amazing promises in the Bible – Ruth’s commitment to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). I think the core of “The Second Mountain” is found in chapter 8 (p. 60-82). We can have hopes, dreams and ideas, but nothing happens until we make a commitment to live in a different way. Like the saying goes: *You can’t get 100% results with a 50% commitment.*

APPLICATION: Where are you in life? Are you on the first mountain, in a valley, on the second mountain, somewhere in between or a combination of both or all three? What have you learned from your experiences? How can awareness and understanding of life’s mountains and valleys help you live with wisdom no matter which place you are currently in? What commitments do you need to make now? How can you merge your commitments into a coherent, focused and joyful life?

This series is from David Brooks’ “The Two Mountains.” Brooks, as a rich and famous secular Jew, was knocked off his 1st mountain of success. He wound up in a Valley of despair. Later, he discovered there is a 2nd mountain – he calls this

Significance. Over the **next 4 weeks** we'll talk about the pillars of the 2nd mountain: **Vocation, Marriage, Faith/Philosophy and Community**. He says the 1st mountain is about trying to be happy/grabbing while the 2nd mountain is about moral joy/giving. The 1st mountain is ME. It leads to being disconnected from others. The 2nd is about OTHERS and tries to build connections. Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with the mountain of success. We want people to be successful. However, when "success" is judged in materialistic ways (finances, fame) rather than in significance, our lives are short-changed. In fact, one could have a significant life w/o ever having achieved success. Life has a way of knocking us off our 1st mountain by BOREDOM ("Is that all there is?"), FAILURE, or by something UNEXPECTED.

Context: For the first 40 years of his life, Moses lived on the 1st Mountain of Success in the most powerful place in the world: Pharaoh's court. Egypt was the dominant world power. Moses was part of that scene. However, when he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew (Moses was Hebrew), he killed the Egyptian and buried the body. When his deed was known, Pharaoh wanted to kill him so he fled Egypt and went into the valley – it was called the land of Midian. His life was in 3 40 year segments: Egypt, Midian, and Leading the Israelites in the wilderness wanderings. 40 years he tended sheep. When he was 80 and for the next 40 years, he lived on the 2nd Mountain of Significance. Let's read about his call.

Exodus 3:1-12

*Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the **wilderness** and came to **Horeb**, the mountain of God. ² And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of **fire** out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³ And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "**Here I am.**" ⁵ Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "**I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.**" And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said, "**I have surely seen** the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸ and **I have come down to deliver them** out of the hand of the Egyptians and **to bring them up** out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ And now,*

*behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ Come, **I will send you to Pharaoh** that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” ¹² He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”*

“**wilderness**” – Moses had his own wilderness experience before he led the Israelites in theirs. The 40 years he spent in Midian would have made the land familiar to him. He was not leading them through the desert blindly. His “valley” was not a 40-year waste of time. He matured and grew up. He learned life skills. His experience helped prepare him. Of course, he also had the pillars of cloud and of fire. After growing up in Pharaoh’s household—becoming a shepherd was also a humbling experience that helped prepare him for the larger task of his life.

Horeb = The Gold of Exodus, claims Horeb is in Saudi Arabia, not in the Sinai Peninsula (Israel). This site fits the biblical description where Moses received the Law. Mt. Horeb is also the site where Elijah will end up after his Mt. Carmel success followed by his descent into the Jezreel Valley of despair.

Moses is in exile. On the one hand, he’s “living the dream” in Midian. He’s done very well for himself. Life in the desert wasn’t like it was back in Egypt, but he’d done all right for himself. On the other hand, he knows he’s blown it. He’s got the case of the “If Only....” regrets. God could never use him, a murderer and a fugitive. So, get over it and move on. However, he sees this curious sight. A bush that is on fire (God seems to love playing with fire) that doesn’t burn up. How can that be? Moses goes over to investigate and hears 3 very important words used in the Bible when people meet God:

“**Here I am**” or “**Here am I**” – These 3 words are spoken as **Abraham’s** response to God at the binding of Isaac test, **Jacob’s** response to God during his night visions, **Samuel’s** response to God’s calling him, **Isaiah’s** response to God’s commissioning, and once in the New Testament: **Ananias’** response to God’s call to heal Saul. “Here I am” means I open myself up for whatever God would want to do in my life. Moses isn’t ready to fully embrace this – he could talk about his physical presence (“Here I am” – as in “over here”) but he wasn’t ready to raise his hand spiritually to be a volunteer in mission. Conversion is like this. It often involves an event, but it also happens in process over time.

“**I am the God of your father**, If you think about it, “success” means we actual succeed someone else. Moses could only be “successful” because he was

“succeeding” Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, his father, etc. It never begins with us – there is always a faith history involved. (See pg 101)

“I have seen...I know...I have come down.” God is present and active. He may not act according to our preferred timing, but He is intimately involved with His people even when we’re in the valley.

I will send you to Pharaoh These 6 words struck fear into Moses life. It was the fugitive returning. His life wasn’t just about his regrets for the past, but God wanted Moses to be his instrument in the FUTURE. Moses offers 5 excuses why he’s not “the guy.” He really didn’t want to do this. He argued with God. He had to take many steps of faith before getting to the promised sign that God would be with him.

The two mountains for Moses were the same mountain (Horeb/Sinai) but it denotes two different periods or experiences in his life. He went from tending sheep to leading a nation. Significance is nearly always through the valley of despair.

APPLICATION: Success is usually about 2 things: materialism and status/comfort.

Ray Bradbury wrote in Fahrenheit 451, *“We have everything we need to be happy, but we’re not happy.”* As Len Sweet wrote: *“We just keep breaking up. Our relationships mirror what is inside us. Wealth and fame, rather than freeing us up for better relationships, often tie us down. MATERIALISM has become the top secular religion. Studies show that the more you identify with your possessions, the greater will be your foul moods, negative attitudes and disabled relationships. In fact, the primary reason why the “happiness” charts fail to keep up with economic progress is because the good things in life are not good “THINGS” but good RELATIONSHIPS – friends – family – loved ones.”*

Significance is not found through stuff, but through relationships. God created us for relationships. The ultimate relationship is with Jesus. That’s what we are about – Helping Others Follow Jesus. Live long enough and you find you need help. That’s what Jesus is about – doing something for us we could never do for ourselves. And He invites us to be part of His church. This is where we can cultivate those relationships. Living with significance is not necessarily easy, but it does produce moral joy.