

Message: Marriage
Sermon Series: Second Mountain
By Pastor Daniel Dennison
Genesis 2:15-25
November 10, 2019

We've been in a series over the Book "2nd Mountain," which is all about how we move from having a life focused on more than just success and instead focus on having a life of significance. And today's topic which David Brooks covers over several chapters in his book is on marriage. And for some reason we thought it would be a good idea for the guy who has only been married 13 years to stand up here and preach to many of you who have been married well over 25 years.

I thought I would probably need some help and so I was thinking about asking my wife Mindy to help me preach this sermon. I envisioned us co-preaching this sermon where I would speak for a little and then she could speak for a little. But as I was trying to envision that I just kept imagining me finishing my part and then her taking her allotted time to tell you how I could have done my part better.

So I guess I'm just going to preach this one by myself today. And what I would like to do this morning is lift up 5 myths that we often think about marriage & relationships and I'm going to help debunk those myths for us.

Brooks states in his book that 40% of marriages end in divorce, an additional 10-15% separate but don't divorce presumably for financial reasons, and an additional 7% stay together because of the kids but are chronically unhappy. Now I would venture to guess that 99.9% of all marriages begin with the intent of having life long, happy, fulfilling marriages. And yet the stats tell us less than 40% of marriages stay together and are actually happy and fulfilling. So I would say this is a pretty important thing for the church to be talking about, because our marriages and our families should be reflecting Christ to the world around us.

The scripture text this morning is Genesis 2:15-25, but I really just want to focus in on one verse this morning and that's v.18. Before I read it to you

let me just remind you that in chapter 1 God takes 6 days to create the world: the sky, the moon and stars, light, trees, vegetation, the ocean, and then finally he creates man. But it's not until part way through chapter 2 that God creates woman. So that's where we are as I read v.18 to you: **The Lord God said: 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'**

This verse is extremely pivotal. And the reason it's so significant is because this is the first time, we find out that something in creation is not good. If you read all of chapter 1, you see that 5 times God creates something and then he steps back and he says "It is good." All of this leads us up to 2:18. And so what we find out is that in a creation where everything is good there is one thing that is like nails on a chalkboard to God, there is one thing that is massively out of whack. What is it? Mankind's isolation. We were not meant to live life in isolation, we were meant to live it in relationship with others.

That leads us to Myth #1: Success and significance is all about self-sufficiency. The world is going to tell you that you just need to take care of yourself and figure out how to take care of your own needs and then you will be successful. But I want to remind you of our scripture and tell you that we were NOT meant to live life in isolation, but instead we were meant to live it in relationship with others. Now at this point in my sermon I am not talking about marriage, though marriage is certainly one way we can live in relationship with others. For all of you in here this morning whether you are married or not, God desires you to live life in relationship with others.

The Bible portrays God as a triune God. What this means is that God is 3 co-eternal co-equal people that exist that are one in essence. So somehow God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are so intimately unified that there is actually only one God. What this means is that deep, intimate, unified relationships are at the core of who God is.

And so right here, before we ever move toward talking about marriage, we need to pause and get clear on something. I can't stand up here and tell you with complete certainty that it will be God's will for each of you to be

married. But I can stand up here with 100% certainty and tell you that it is God's will for you to go through life with deep, intimate unified friendships. The best way for you to go through life is with a few men and women at your side with whom you are fully known and fully loved.

What that means is they know and celebrate your strengths, but they've also seen behind the curtain and they know your weaknesses as well. They will constantly love you, but they will also challenge you and tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear.

Ok so myth #1 is that life is all about self-sufficiency. **But here's myth #2: In order to be fulfilled in life, you need to get married.** We have been fed a lie by culture and Hollywood that if we can just find our soulmate, and I'll say more about that lie in a few minutes and have that fairytale wedding that we will live happily ever after. I think the church has also been guilty at times of projecting this idea that we need to marry and do it at a young age and start having kids. But there is only one thing that can bring us ultimate fulfillment in life and it is NOT marriage.

Let me try and illustrate it for you this way: During my junior year in college a friend asked me if I could help him move from his apartment on one side of town to the other. He didn't have a car and although all I had was an Acura legend, it was better than nothing. He assured me that most of the big stuff had been moved a couple days earlier with his friend's truck. So when I arrived it was mostly a few boxes, a couple of suitcases and a few nick knacks. The only problem was that he still had a mattress.

So we threw that thing on top of my car, a 2 door 1988 Acura Legend, and I said: so you have some rope or something? And he said, uhh... no. And so we proceeded to drive down Robinson Street with each of us holding our arm out the window and attempting to hold down the mattress. Despite the ridiculous looks we were getting, this was actually working pretty well until just half a mile from his new apartment a dog runs out in the street, I hit my brakes and the mattress goes flying right off over the front of the car. Scaring the heck out of that dog by the way. After much embarrassment, dirty looks, and honking horns, we eventually got that mattress to his new apartment. No thanks to my little Acura legend.

Now that Acura was a really good car. And when driven under the right parameters, under the designed intent of the Acura engineers, you will almost always get good results, because it's just a good car. But if you use that car in a way they never intended, then you will almost always have some kind of disaster on your hands.

So here's the reality of marriage: If we treat a marriage within the bounds of its God intended purpose, we will tend to get pretty good results. But if we approach marriage seeking to get from it things that marriage was never meant to do, it's kind of like trying to transport a mattress with an Acura legend. You are courting disaster.

So before we ever talk about marriage this morning I just want to address something that I believe is applicable to every single individual in this room single, married, widowed, or divorced. If we don't love ourselves, if we don't like who God has created us to be, if we are constantly consumed thinking about things, we perceive to be negative attributes about ourselves, a relationship or a marriage will never fix that.

So many of us, with the help of our culture, have bought into this lie that if we could just find someone to fall in love with and they would also fall in love with us, that then we could love who we are as individuals. But the problem with that thinking is that's like trying to transport a mattress with an Acura legend. Relationships are not made for that. You are asking a relationship to do something it was never designed to do.

As awesome as my wife is, her companionship and love does not allow me to like myself and it certainly doesn't free me to love myself. She cannot do that for me, can you imagine the pressure she would feel if that's truly what I was expecting from her?

If you are looking to a relationship or a marriage to bring this kind of fulfillment in your life, then not only are you putting a tremendous amount of weight and pressure on someone else, but there will always be some amount of underlying disappointment and frustration. Because no matter what the other person does for you, it will never be enough.

I've got a movie clip to show you that perfectly sums up this myth. It's from a movie that came out when I was in HS, Jerry Maguire, let's take a look...

You complete me?? I mean I'm a romantic guy, my wife would vouch for me on that, but you complete me? That's a load of junk! No relationship can handle in a healthy way the pressure of one person looking for another person to complete them. No other human being, not your spouse, not your child, not your sibling, not your best friend, not your parent, can complete you in such a way that it makes you actually love who you are. Hear this next line clearly: If you can't love and like who you are by yourself, you will never love who you are when you have a significant other.

The only person who can complete you, the only person who can help you love yourself for who you are is God. If you seek to fill the hole or the despair in your heart with anything other than God, you will ultimately find disappointment.

Ok, here's marriage myth #3: **God has a soulmate picked for everyone!** Let me tell you why this is a lie: Marriage is a decision. You get to decide who and when you will marry! God lets you choose if you will marry and WHO you will marry, and thus there is no such thing as "the one."

I can't even imagine the kind of pressure you would feel if you believed of your 3.5 billion marriage options that there was only one for you. There's way too much pressure if you believe there's a fated one that you have to find. The lie that God has "the one" for you makes a great romantic movie or Disney fairytale, but it's a terrible approach to finding a spouse. It would be crazy for me to think that my wife Mindy could not have found someone else and lived a great life with them. And I don't think it would be disloyal in any way for me to say that there are probably others out there that I could have married and had a great fulfilling life with. But 14 years ago this March, I stood before God and my friends and my family and I made Mindy my choice and she made me her choice and in that moment of making those vows, and not a moment before, we became each other's one.

So real quick just to review: Myth #1: Success is all about self-sufficiency, #2 Marriage is all about fulfillment, myth #3 God has a soulmate for every person.

Myth #4: Marriage is a contract. We have been taught to treat marriage like a contract, but here's the reality: marriage is a covenant! You see with a contract, you agree to do certain things for someone and in exchange they agree to do certain things for you. But in a contract if someone fails to hold up their end of the agreement, then the other person is free to walk away from that contract and void it. And this is a really great business model. Contracts work well in business.

But it doesn't work so well for marriage. Because I can assure you that no matter how great you are and no matter how great your spouse is there will be some things that you don't deliver on and there will be some things that your spouse doesn't completely fulfill even though in the beginning, they said they would. If we treat marriage like a contract, then what happens is as your spouse begins to stop fulfilling some part of certain expectations you had then you begin to start slacking in some areas and sometimes very slowly and other times very quickly that marriage begins to dissolve. At some point it dissolves enough that you pull out all together, you break the contract because you believe you can go and have your needs met better elsewhere.

When you treat a marriage like a covenant as opposed to a contract, then even when you experience your spouse's failures and the incompatibilities that are inevitable. And when you go through those seasons of life that your spouse is just so exhausted maybe from work, maybe from taking care of sick kids, maybe from a season of depression and anxiety, when you go through these seasons, though you will be disappointed and it will be difficult, you're not going to walk away and void that covenant.

And this takes us to the Final lie that we've bought into: Marriage is all about having our needs met. Brooks will argue for the opposite in 2nd Mountain, he says this: "If two spouses each say, 'I'm going to treat my self-centeredness as the main problem in the marriage,' you have the prospect of a truly great marriage." See, when we're focused on having our needs

met, that's really just self-centeredness, but when we acknowledge that our self-centeredness is the main problem, then we are focusing on our spouse's needs rather than our own.

Let me remind you what our scripture says: **"It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."**

I think the tendency when we read this passage is to dwell upon the word helper and we think, ok here's man and now God is going to bring him a little helper to work in the kitchen and serve him and that is so far from what God intends with marriage. The Hebrew word for helper is the word, "Ezer (A-Zer)."

When the word Ezer is used in scripture, it's always used to signify someone that is stronger helping someone that is weaker. I will make for him an Ezer, someone who is stronger who will help him and be his companion. Sometimes it's used to describe people, but Most often it's used to describe God. God is the Ezer, the stronger who is going to help us, the weaker. The implication of this story is not simply that the woman would be the Ezer, but that both man and woman would be the Ezer. The woman will help the man and be his companion and the man will help the woman and be her companion.

The idea of helping in this passage is to bless. For those of you that are in a relationship, do you realize that your mission should be to continually ask yourself: how can I bless this person? For those that hope to be in a relationship in the near future, do you think about a relationship in the sense of how I can bless someone, or do you think of it in the sense of: how can I have my needs met? The purpose of marriage is to continually strive to bless your spouse, NOT have your needs met.

Now to help make my case on this I want to show you what the traditional marriage vows are that we use in a typical wedding ceremony. They say this:

In the name of God,

I Daniel take you Mindy to be my wedded wife.
To have and to hold,
From this day forward,
For better, for worse,
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health,
To love and to cherish,
Until we are parted by death
This is my solemn vow.

I want you to think about these words. You are promising to take your spouse for better AND for worse. Now better is marrying someone who is your best friend. Better is taking vacations together. Better is the incredible gift of sex that God has given us. Better is roasting smores over a fire on a Friday night with your kids. Better is watching your kids graduate and get married and have their own kids. But better is always coupled to worse.

And worse involves all of the ways that you and your spouse find out you're not compatible. Worse involves your spouse going through a season of depression or battling addiction. Worse involves a child who struggles with a learning disability or maybe a crippling illness. You're vowing to commit your life to this person in good health, when your body is young and spry, when you are able to run a marathon, but health is always coupled with sickness. And sickness involves bodies that get older and rounder and wrinklier, it might involve cancer or a disability.

You are vowing for richer, so when you get that job promotion, when you finish that PHD, when you get a bonus at work. But richer is always coupled to poorer and so you're committed to your spouse when they get laid off, when there's a recession and you go belly up on your house. And you are committing to ALL of this, the good and the bad, until death do you part. There is NOTHING in these vows that talk about what you're going to get out of marriage. Marriage is not about having your needs met, it's about committing your life to loving and serving the one you choose to spend your life with.

So here's how I'd like to close this morning. The difficulty with a topic like marriage is that I know I'm preaching to a wide variety of people in different stages of life. So I want to offer a word of application to every person regardless of what stage of life you are in.

There are some in here this morning who are married, but you would admit that your marriage is not what it once was. Perhaps you have grown distant, maybe even cynical of one another. Maybe your kids are the only thing holding you together or perhaps your kids have recently left the house and that has exposed some cracks in your marriage. Brooks says in 2nd Mountain: "The first love is champagne. But after you've been married and you've had scores of fights and scores of recoveries, you find you've entered into your 2nd love, which is less passionate but has the potential to be much more enduring."

What I would want you to hear this morning is that it is never too late to find healing in a marriage. Your application is to go back to doing the things that led your spouse to falling in love with you. If you feel like you're in a lukewarm marriage, it's probably because one or both of you have become complacent. Commit this day to re-committing to one another. Get some counseling, set up a meeting with a pastor on our staff, come to the altar this morning and pray with one another and ask one of us to pray with you. Decide today that you are going to commit to doing the hard work of bringing healing in your marriage.

There are some in here this morning who are reeling and in pain from a lost relationship. It may be a divorce, or it may be the death of your spouse. If that's you I just want to start by saying that I am so sorry you are finding yourself in a season of loss and grief. You are in the right place this morning because you need to have great Christian men and women around you to support you. I have two quick applications for you:

First, re-commit yourself to the Lord. There are many things in this world that we often try to fill our loneliness and sorrow with, but Jesus Christ is the only one who can satisfy. Spend some time praying through the Psalms every day for the next 3 months and learn how the Psalmists dealt with their own grief and sorrow. Hear these words from Psalm 25: **Turn to me**

oh Lord and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. Guard my soul and deliver me. I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.

My other application for you is a real practical one: Keep doing the things in your life that help you stay healthy. The loss of a loved one whether from divorce or death can lead to a season of depression, so it's vitally important you continue to get good sleep, go to the gym, eat healthy, spend time with friends. We also have great classes here at Asbury for those who have gone through divorce as well as those who have lost a loved one. Don't be afraid to seek out the help of a counselor or a pastor or one of these LifeCare classes.

There are some of you in here who are longing to be married. I realize it's easy for the married guy to stand up here and say this, but I believe it's still good advice: **Be patient, wait upon the Lord, and find contentment in God NOT in the dream of being married.** Before I got married, I had 2 relationships that lasted over a year and ended in heartache. I had a broken engagement. I had several really bad first dates. I had my share of getting rejected for a first date. But God was faithful and God was good. God didn't bring Mindy and I together on our time, because if it were up to us, we would have married other people several years before we even met each other. If marriage is the desire of your heart, tell God that, pray for that, pray for your future mate, but be patient and seek your contentment from Christ.

Finally, there are some of you in here this morning who are happily married and you might even say that your marriage is as strong as it has ever been. You take your spouse's hand right now and together you praise God for that. Marriage is hard work, the hardest work I have ever been a part of, so it's important to celebrate and thank God when times are good. For you I would offer you two applications: #1 Stay committed to doing the things that keep your marriage strong. Have date nights, serve one another, pray with and for one another, continue to regularly speak your spouse's love language.

MUSICIANS START PLAYING!

Here's application #2 for you and this is really a word for everyone: Be more aware of all the other groups I just identified and figure out how you can breath life and speak words of grace and wisdom into their lives. I talked to a lot of people for this sermon because I wanted to make sure it spoke to more than just married people. Listen to some of these quotes:

From a single person: Sometimes it feels like I don't fit at church because I don't have a significant other. Yes, I want a spouse, but I'm also ok hanging out with other married people, don't be afraid to include single people in your social circles.

From a widow: Widows carry a burden. The burden of a relationship lost. The burden of grief. The burden of regrets. The burden of loneliness. We carry the burden for responsibilities which were once shouldered by our spouse, exponentially increasing the weight of our own load.

From someone who is divorced: I have never felt more isolated and even abandoned as I have in the months during and after my divorce. And if I'm honest, I felt it the most at church. The church has to do better... divorce is not god's design, but it shouldn't be an excommunication from the expression of grace God has extended to us and the love he has called us to extend to others.

The best thing I have to offer you this morning is an invitation to follow Jesus Christ. Whether you are single, married, divorced or widowed, the greatest decision you could make today is to commit or re-commit yourself to following Jesus. It will re-orient everything else in your life.