



---

**Twolgnite**  
**Backing Up The Marriages Around You**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Hey, we are grateful that you're here. If you are brand new to our church, today is Twolgnite Sunday. We take the second Sunday of every month and we talk about marriage. Whatever series we are in, we pause and talk about marriage and family, so you catch us on one of those Sundays. Today, we are talking about *Backing Up The Marriages Around You*.

Is there anyone in here that when you drive down the road and listen to music, you turn it up and you are that artist? Be really honest. I'm not the only one that does this. You just think *I could do this. Had I had parents that moved me in this direction, I could be awesome*. And then you're like well that's not me. How many of you can admit that you are not awesome. I'm raising my hand. But still, you turn the music up.

Have you ever dreamed about being a backup singer? Has anybody ever dreamed about being on the back of the stage? Am I the only one that did this as well?

We are going to talk about that today, but before we do, we take an offering here at Woodland Hills as part of our worship. We say thank you for your generosity and we want to encourage you to continue to be generous. You'll notice all that's going on across campus to make room for and continue to grow the ministries for our children and for our students. We are grateful for what you continue to do and we say thank you.

**Every marriage is a duet.**

We are going to jump right in to this today as we look at this big idea that every marriage is a duet. This works perfectly for the town of Branson. We believe every marriage is a duet. There are lyrics that you brought into the marriage and your spouse brought into the marriage and the best part about being married is that we get to create this song together.

The Song of Songs is the ultimate duet. It's the Solomon and the Shulamite woman's lyrics coming together. In Chapters 1 and 2, we see they have desire and attraction that turns into dating. In Chapter 3, they get married. In Chapter 4, there is a honeymoon. The whole book is a compilation of lyrics, going back and forth between Solomon and the Shulamite woman. It's a beautiful picture of a duet.

We are going to jump right into Song of Songs 2 because the first one to speak, that we will see today, is Solomon and he says this about the Shulammitte woman.

**14** *My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside...* Every woman in here is a dove. We have to get to know you. We have to figure out what's in your mind. We have to figure out what makes you tick. What makes marriage fun is figuring out why you say the things you say and why you do the things you do.

Look at what he goes on to say. *...show me your face, let me hear your voice...* Now I remind you that they are not yet married; they are caught up in attraction and they are dating. So these lyrics will make more sense when you see them from the perspective of a dating couple.

*...for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.* This is a pre-engaged couple. This is a newlywed couple. He's like "Man I could listen to her talk all day long. She is precious. And when she is really making a point and the pitch of her voice goes up, I think that is so adorable. I love that she has an opinion for everything." I think this is precious. This is love so he is expressing it. He's getting to know her. He wants to draw her out. This is what makes dating fun; this is what makes marriage fun. He wants to get to know her. And then as he get to know her... This is the verse in the Song of Songs of curiosity and fascination. As he gets to know her, he is fascinated with what he is learning.

Now let me ask you if you think our culture today has really grasped this? Or do you think couples get to a point where they think they have learned enough and they have discovered things about each other in the cleft of the rock and in the hiding place on the mountainside. It's like we went to some places and I discovered some things about you that after I discovered them, I decided I don't like you so much. I feel judged now that you learned that about me. I wish I never would have shared that.

The most common definition you've probably every heard on intimacy is being fully known and fully accepted. "I shared my heart and your response was you liked it. Your voice is sweet and your face is lovely; give me more of that." Look at what this does because now we are going to move from Solomon to the Shulammitte woman. I have to keep bringing this up because it's very important. They are not yet married.

Look what it says in Verse 16. Now this is the Shulammitte woman. **16** *My beloved is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies.* In other words, this is a statement, a verse of exclusivity. It's one man, one woman, for one lifetime. The more he gets to know her and the more she gets to know him, the more they move towards oneness. The more they accept one another, the more they love one another. She knows things about him and he knows things about her. This is what creates compatibility over a long period of time.

We have this term now that we use in marriage and you hear people use it as an excuse to divorce. "We're no longer compatible." That's a socially acceptable term for "We choose to no longer get along." "We choose to no longer be one." I'll say it again for all of my students and all my young friends in here not yet married and pursuing. Don't fall for the lie that says compatibility is something you test for or stumble into or discover. Compatibility is something you create over a long period of time as you ask one

another great questions, as you get to know one another, as you find out what's really going on. I still, to this day, learn things about Amy and we've learned things about each other.

Let me tell you... This didn't over so well in the first service, but I just decided... Sometimes you are supposed to cut things that don't go well; other times, you commit and press harder. Which one do you want me to go with? I'm committing and pressing harder. I'm just going to make this statement. Amy and I have a duet and it does not include the beach. We've tried to be the romantic couple on the beach. We see it in movies all the time. Romantic couples make out while sweating and dirty, hoping the tide comes in.

I'm not going to give you too much information, but we finally had to look at each other and be like we don't enjoy this. My wife is from Nebraska and I grew up in Illinois, but we've been told the beach is where you go on vacation. How many of you love the beach? How many of you... Look at you; you're like *it's not culturally acceptable to say you don't like the beach*. I'm saying it. Say it with me if you if you're with me. Raise your hand if you don't care for the beach. I've never been a huge fan of it, but we've tried. You should see our family of four take our shoes and socks off for an obligatory walk down to the water. The whole time we're walking it's like "This is nasty; watch where you walk. There's a bottle cap right there; don't step on that." But this is what couples and families do.

Last year, we were in Tampa. It was our family and Gary and Norma. Gary and Norma love the beach. Norma can sit on the beach and watch the beach all day long. I knew this was an exciting time for them and I decided it would be okay. We were only going to have about 30 minutes or maybe an hour to enjoy the beach the next morning before we had to take off for home. So I went down early and rented six chairs. I got the umbrellas all set up because we are going to enjoy the beach. I got them all set up and I paid the guy his \$480.00 for the six chairs or whatever it was. I was thinking how we didn't have much time so we had to have a great experience.

We got out of the hotel about 9:00. The wind was blowing off the gulf at about 60 miles an hour. It was about 50 degrees. We went and sat in the chairs with the wind blowing around us. We tried to talk to each other, yelling over the wind. "Isn't this good?! Aren't we having a good time?! We're at the beach!" We're just sitting there gripping the chairs and trying to enjoy it. We were wet and dirty. You get sand in every crevice that takes weeks to get out. We couldn't wait for the 30 minutes to be up, but we could tell people we were at the beach.

Amy and I are 18 years married next week and, for the very first time, we looked at each other and said "Can we just admit we don't like the beach? Can we pick a hotel that has a pool near the beach and stay by the pool?" You get drinks deliver a lot quicker to the pool than you do down by the beach and I need my diet coke as often as I possibly can get it.

That's who we are, but let me tell you that I have learned about Amy, and our duet has changed over the years. We've become foodies. If you ask Amy what she thinks is the perfect vacation... I can tell you what the perfect vacation is for her. It's a big city and it's walking around. If I said to Amy if I can take you somewhere for two days, what do you want to do? She would say, without skipping a beat, "let's go to New York. Let's get in Manhattan and let's walk and let's enjoy fine food and diet coke paired with it." This is her passion. "Let's see a couple of shows, go enjoy good food, and walk." My wife has not

learned how to rest. She doesn't know how to do that. She doesn't know how to value rest. She doesn't know how to just chill and that's probably one reason she doesn't like the beach.

In June our kids went to camp. If you are looking for a spiritual blessing for your children and for your marriage, it's Kanakuk Kamps. I had no idea what dropping my kids off and having a week of partaaay would be for Amy and me. We want them fed and they are having the time of their life. They could have stayed two weeks, but we only did one week. Next year, I've decided they are doing three months at Kanakuk Kamp. I have no idea what this is going to run me, but we had so much fun with the week that we are just going to commit to the three months.

So we went to New York and I just know this is what she wants to do. We get up in the morning and she laces up her shoes and what are we going to do? We are going to walk. And we are going to walk. And we are going to walk. We stayed in Time Square and we walked down to Ground Zero. She knew I wanted to do that and it's a long walk, a lot of miles.

We get down there and we are walking around Ground Zero. We had a show that afternoon and she wanted to eat at Mark Forgione's restaurant in the Financial Center, back down at Ground Zero. Our plan was to go to the show, come out and get a cab to get back down there. I was so ready for this after the show because it was four miles to the restaurant. But as the show ends and we are walking out, I realize I know what would make her happy more than anything and that would be if we walked the four miles to dinner. So I asked her. You could see her light up. We get out of the show and we were going to hail a cab. I looked at her and said "Do you want to walk to dinner?" We had about an hour or hour and a half. You just have to see her face light up.

I brought proof of it because I keep all of this on my phone. You can get an app that keeps track of the love you have for your spouse. Mine is called the Walk a Man or the Walk a Meter or whatever it is. This is just one day of many in New York, but we started in Time Square and walked all the way down to Ground Zero. Then we came up and went to Chelsea Market and then back to Time Square. Can you read that? It was 11 ½ miles. I was so wiped out. It took three hours and thirteen minutes, but I know for us... That's us. Amy loves that more than anything.

I say all that for this point. You have your own duet and it's unique to you. You get to create it. You get to write it. You get to put the lyrics together. Don't look at all the couples around you and what they do. You can try it. We've tried the beach because, again, it's what the postcards and the commercials and everything say you're supposed to do, but that's not our duet. Our duet is different. Your duet is different.

**Every marriage is a duet that stirs emotions in others.**

Your duet stirs emotions in me. You've been around the couple that after you've been in their presence, you leave, thinking *That was painful, that was exhausting, that was heavy metal right there, that was not good, that was satanic lyrics backwards is what that was and I can't do that anymore. They contradict each other and they yell at one another the whole time.*

But then you've been around the couples that when you leave their presence, you are refreshed. "That couple refreshed me. Amy, what can we do to get around the couple more. What can we do to have a marriage that looks like theirs? Because we have been with the other couple and decided we don't want that, but we've been with this couple and we want that."

This is a very important question to start with this morning. What emotions does your marriage stir in other? Are you the run from couple or are you the run to couple? Are you the "I've got to get more of this couple" couple?

**Every marriage is a duet that needs backup singers harmonizing from the background.**

I looked up the word harmony this week because, again, I'm not a musician, but I want to be one so badly. I told you that I'm learning the guitar; G, C, and D are the three cords I know. I don't plan on learning any more. Something will come on the radio and Amy will go "Hey, do you think you can do that song?"

I look it up on Guitar Tab and go "They threw in a B Minor; you'll never hear that song come from my guitar or lips because I don't have that many fingers to try to stretch across the guitar."

Here is the definition of harmony. Harmony is the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions, having a pleasing affect. That's what good backup singers do. They are in the background – the spotlight is not on them – but when their voice comes into your duet, it adds to it, it enhances it, it makes it good.

This week, I listened to music, and you know I listen to country music from time to time. I love country music. When the background singers come in at the right time... I know it's all done in a studio, but when they are on pitch and they have good harmony, it just brings the whole experience to a beautiful level.

Watch what happens in the Song of Songs 1: 4. This verse is kind of paralleling my passion for Ecclesiastes 9: 9 which is ***Enjoy life with your wife whom you love all your meaningless days.*** This one is right up there because this is not Solomon and this is not the Shulammitte woman; this is the daughters of Jerusalem. They come in as the backup singer to this duet. You see them throughout the whole book. If you want a good Bible study, take a highlighter this week and everywhere you see them speak, highlight it. It's not the majority of the text, but there is a lot of text in there where they are speaking and backing up the marriage.

Here is what they say. ***We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.*** For the Baptists, I will say it again just to help you: more than wine. It's from the background that we are speaking blessing over, that we are encouraging the marriages and the couples around us.

I was in an unnamed retail store here in Branson a few weeks back with my son Carson. You know how you go in a store and you'll separate from your kids a little bit and you'll only be an aisle or two apart? Carson and I were just separated by one aisle. When I came back around to where Carson was... Don't

try to guess which retailer it was; I'm going to change the details and hide the details enough so you can't figure out who it is or if you work there.

I could tell he was being tailed by one of the employees of the store. You know what I mean by that, right? They were suspicious that he was shoplifting. As a dad, it just automatically hits me because I'm struggling with the fact that today we look at all kids and teenagers as though they are hoodlums. If you see a teenager walk in, he's automatically up to something bad. We have bad confirmation bias when it comes to teens today and we need to change our attitude with that just a little bit.

But I saw this guy looking. He didn't have the best training in the world because he was way obvious. Then I come around Carson and start asking questions and then he starts inspecting me. Well if you've been here for any period of time, you know me well enough to know I'm going to have fun with this. So I started acting suspicious. If you ever read that your pastor was arrested for shop lifting, give it a day or two. My name will be cleared; I was just having some fun with the employees. I didn't take anything, but I just started looking like I did something wrong. It was just in my body language. I was walking around, looking back and forth...

And then there were three employees that were watching us in the aisle. I wanted to look at them and go "You're pretty obvious. We've stolen nothing..." I get that it's a big issue and the retailers in here are like "You have no idea; we get robbed blind in Branson!" No you don't; this is a Christian community, okay? There's no shoplifting going on in a Christian community." Again, just like those retailers, there is an art to backup singing. And all my entertainer friends would say "Yes because I have some backup singers in the show that I work in that want the stage up front." They haven't learned the skill of being in the background. They haven't learned the skill of making the duet up front with the microphone shine. And all the entertainers said... There are like four of them saying "Amen; you've got to camp out here for a while..."

So let's break this verse down for just a little bit so we can begin learning. This is a passion of ours. Instead of your family getting into crisis and you calling or sending them to an intensive or to counseling, we feel, as a church, that we need to move into a direction where we begin equipping every follower of Jesus to back up the marriages around them to help in all different seasons of life and all different stages of life. What can you say or what can you do to help the marriages around you?

### **Rejoice and Delight – A spontaneous expression of excitement and cheer.**

Meaning when something happens, you respond. You feel this at a wedding. We cheer a lot at Woodland Hills' weddings. At the end, where I say "I now pronounce you husband and wife," there is a big cheer. Or when I say you may kiss the bride, there is a big cheer. We are trying to create a viral moment on YouTube. Then I jump over here and we face the crowd and I go "It's a privilege and honor for me to be the first to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs.... and we send them out with loud cheering.

It's what I experience at Sight and Sound in the Jonah show when they come out and sing *I'm Free*. When they are doing that song, something starts bubbling up inside of me. I had something that had to come out. I told you this in the spring. What came out of me at this moment... I was excited and I didn't want to embarrass my family, but the Lord was stirring in me and this is what came out. It was a short

“Woo!” That was it. The guy next to me is sleeping and I’m thinking *Come on, we just saw people go from death to life; this is amazing.*

What marriage is in your life right now that when you get around this couple, your first thought is “Woo!” That’s rejoice and delight. You’re like “Well I have this one couple that we don’t do a lot of rejoicing and delighting in.” Are there aspects of their marriage, are there moments in their marriage that you can point to and look at and go *when I watch them do this, when they say this, when he opens the door for her, when she speaks words of high value over him, inside of me I’m thinking “Woo.”* Today is all about how we get that “Woo” out to bless and encourage the marriages around you.

So that’s rejoice and delight, but then you add the word *praise*. Now the word *praise* is an interesting word in our English language because the Hebrew language has multiple words for *praise*. The best example I can give you is it’s the same thing with snow and Eskimos. Eskimos have like 18 words to describe our one word *snow*. For all its different forms and all of its different precipitation; they have all different words to describe it. We say snow. We say praise, but there are many words throughout the Old Testament, many Hebrew words that describe the word *praise*. I’m going to give you a few of them before we look at what the word *praise* in the Song of Songs 1: 4 actually means.

*Praise* in Psalm 7: 17 means to sing and make music. So if you ever hear a pastor or a sermon where someone says praise is not music, that’s not true. Praise is more than music, but praise includes music. It’s part of our worship and we have a “Woo” moment as we sing.

It also means to shine or to boast. That’s Psalm 150: 1-6. When you read Psalm 150, you see “Praise him” all throughout. This is making the name of the Lord great.

In Psalm 145: 1, it means to rise up. So you lift up.

In the Song of Songs 1: 4, this is what it means. It’s an expression of gratefulness for a past event. The hymns of our faith are rooted right here. When the writers of our hymns got together, it wasn’t just “Lord, I praise you because of who you are, not for all the mighty things that you have done.” It was “Lord I praise you for who you are and for all the mighty things that you have done.” “I remember my salvation and when I think back to what you rescued me from, I praise you.”

I heard a pastor preaching this week. I listened to four or five sermons this week and each one of them had a profound impact on me, but this one pastor said “I hear a lot of people out there today wanting to forget their sin. They come to the Lord, find the Lord, they are forgiven, but then they think that as far as the east is from the west they want to forget it.” God does that and you’re not God. He has not given you the ability to forget, but he has forgiven you. Why is it important that we remember?

This pastor said two things that I thought were beautiful and fit right here. He said, “For one, if you could forget your sin, you probably would repeat it more often.” It would be like... Probably nobody in here right now is burnt. That’s because you know fire will burn you. But if you could forget the truth that fire will burn you, we all would be bandaged up in here right now. I know not to stick my hand in fire because I’ve done it before.

He said “The second thing is if you could forget sin, you would forget the victory that Christ has over your sin.” This brings about praise in us when we are reminded... It’s an expression of gratefulness for a past event. So when we praise, when we worship, we are reminded of what we have been rescued from.

This couple is sharing their lyrics back and forth and now the daughters of Jerusalem step in and they say “We will praise that, we will be reminded of the love that you have because the day may come where you don’t experience the same level of love that you have right now.” What do happy couples and divorced couples have in common? Happy couples and divorced couples both share the same level marital satisfaction on the day of their wedding. An expression of gratefulness for a past event says I go back to your wedding and I remember the joy you had and I’m grateful for it, so I will praise that.

### **Who brings harmony to your marriage?**

You need to start right now thinking through the backup singers in your life. There are some who bring great harmony to your marriage and you need to turn them up. I asked the students when they came back from camp what their biggest take away from camp was. They told me the biggest take away was the speaker that spoke on voices. He said we all have voices in our life and the reality today is we all have way too many voices in our life. He said we have to start thinking through all the voices in our life because there are some you need to turn down and there are some you need to mute altogether. In other words unfriend, block or whatever you have to do because you don’t need to hear that person anymore. Then there are some you need to turn way up.

Identify the people right now in your life... If you’re single, you need to find the people that know how to honor and enjoy and prioritize marriage and turn them up in your life. Mute the ones who dishonor marriage. Mute the ones who have told you that you should never get married because it’s just too risky. Mute that voice. Mute the ones who don’t know how to prioritize it. Who is leading your duet off key? Find them and mute them.

I heard my wife counseling with somebody this week. This person was out of state. We know how to do this, right? We call people who we know what they are going to say. My wife confronted this person just by saying “You called her because you knew she would validate the decision you’re thinking about right now. You were wanting someone to validate this decision even though you know this is not the right decision. You need some truth spoken into your life.” So we need backup singers who will tell us what we need to hear, not what we want to hear.

Again, I’m going to get very practical with this today because there is a group in here that I don’t feel we’ve talked a whole lot about for a while on Twolgnite Sundays. I’ve experienced this a lot in the last six months or year. It’s parents who watch their adult children’s marriage begin to fall apart and they don’t know what to say and they don’t know what to do. They will call for advice in what to do or say because their child is getting a divorce. They want to know what they can do to help. I see a lot of parents today clamming up, saying there is really nothing we can do to jump in and bless the marriage, bless the family of our children. I believe there is a lot you can do and that’s how I want to take this application.

It's this verse right here, it's part of our Twolgnite messaging, it's the last word in Twolgnite. Genesis 2:24 says ***For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*** The first half of this verse is the parenting implication and the second half is the marriage implication.

It's our responsibility, Mom and Dad, to make sure our children leave home as adults, not on a journey to become one. Academics and athletics do not raise children into adults, parents do that. But it's this part here that we often don't talk about as we move from leaving home as adults, not prolonged adolescents or children, and becoming one in marriage.

### **Backing Up Your Child's Marriage:**

I want to talk for a bit about Father and Mother. What happens at this moment...? I know I speak harshly to Mom and Dad at times at a wedding where the mom says "I don't feel like I'm losing a son today, I feel like I'm gaining a daughter." I tell her "Nope, you're losing a son; back away." The idea there is cut the strings. I want to talk to Mom and Dad for just a few moments as we close out. How do you backup your child's marriage? You say "Ted, I'm supposed to cut the strings. We know that and we are trying to figure out how we cut the strings and slip into the background and bless their marriage."

#### **1. "Cut the strings" by separating from your child relationally, emotionally, and financially.**

This means they are going to have to buy their own Starbucks. They are off your friends and family plan. They are going to buy their own clothes. Here is what I tell people. You separate relationally, emotionally, and financially and if that doesn't work and if necessary, you separate geographically. I love the people that say I live next door to my parents. That may not be the best idea. That may be a challenge. That may be difficult. So we understand the cutting of the strings physically, emotionally, and relationally.

#### **2. Bring harmony to their duet without turning it into a trio or quartet.**

So this is your son or your daughter that you love. You know that dad at the wedding who, when he has given his daughter away and has spoken blessing over them, you hear him speaking to her in the ear and you hear sounds of crying. He knows what's happening. It's at that moment that he is separating from his daughter and he's moving back to the background. I think this is a transition we don't talk about a whole lot in the church or how we do this. How do you avoid enmeshment, which is another idea for a trio or quartet, when mom and dad are too much the ally to their child?

#### **3. Advocate for the couple, not just your child.**

You need to bless the marriage and don't be that person that your daughter or son calls to bash the spouse. Guard against that, speak words of high value over the marriage and the value of marriage and honoring and enjoy it and prioritizing it.

#### **4. Guard your heart from treating your child as a victim.**

We do this too often where the other spouse, the in-law, is the one with the problem. You've done everything right. No. You love your child. You're grateful for your child, but you have to ask the questions of person responsibility. What are you doing to contribute to this?

#### **5. Avoid Labeling your son-in-law or daughter-in-law.**

Don't place the label on them. I've worked with some families lately where there is major conflict in the marriage, but as I dig into it, I realize there is no abuse going on, emotionally, physically, or verbally. They both just argue a lot. But one of the parents has labeled because the daughter labeled the pastor (he is a pastor I've been working with) as an abuser.

A lot of people are moving towards abuse quickly and I don't want to minimize at all the physical, emotional, or verbal abuse, but I have discovered some cases lately where people are running to that so they can have a reason to divorce and continue dating the person they have over here on the side. So that label is being thrown around and when I meet with them and I hear one of them accuse the other as being an abuser, I want to look at them and say "You scream more in here than he does. You scream and yell, so it's not just a male thing, it's a female thing as well." It got really serious in here. That's a whole other message and I don't want to minimize anything, but be very careful with labels.

#### **6. Leverage Christmas and anniversaries.**

Use those opportunities. I heard of a couple in Phoenix. The lady was actually on staff at a church. She has five brothers and sisters, so there are six of them all together. I thought this was a beautiful idea. Her parents called them all and said "I want you to write out your most creative date ideas and then bring them home with you are Christmas."

So all six couples showed up at Christmas and Grandma and Grandpa said, "We are going to listen to every date and then you all are going to vote on the most creative date and the most creative date gets an all-expenses paid vacation to..." I thought that was incredible. That's a mom and a dad backing up the marriages of their children to say "We value what you have going on."

Take the kids for a week. The grandparents are thinking *I knew we were going to be getting in trouble with this one. We have to have them for a whole week?* Grandma and Grandpa, let me help you out here. You can scholarship them to Kanakuk. That's a good idea right there; you have to admit it. We know your medication is taking a toll on you right now, so we understand that. We bless you and we honor you.

I want to give you one way to do that. Have you ever noticed that birthday cards and anniversary cards all have the same tone? The tone is really "You made it!" How wonderful is that to get a card for 25 years of marriage that says "Well you sucked it up and pushed through it, congratulations." You've been in the aisle at Target or Walmart, standing there looking at the cards. We are all looking at the same cards and especially we men are going what do I want to say that I'm too lazy to write?

We, today, as you came in, handed you a marriage card. This isn't an anniversary card. This isn't a wedding card. This is a marriage card. This is to bless the marriages around you. Corey Mitchell... If you've not met Cory Mitchell, he is on our staff. This is his idea and creation and I think it is absolutely beautiful. We are going to give Hallmark a run for their money. Here is how we are using these cards now at our church. When you come to a wedding at Woodland Hills... Every single guest who comes to the wedding will receive one of these cards. Whether it's a wedding we do offsite at a chapel in town or at a hosta garden, every guest will get one of these cards.

We have the processional and everybody is in place and dad walks down with his daughter and we do the giving of the bride. I always like to take the bride and groom and just kind of set them to the side. You've been to a wedding; weddings are tense. There are all sorts of details and it's formal and everybody is on edge. The bride and groom usually don't get to enjoy the moment until they watch the video. So what I do is move them aside and tell them to talk amongst themselves, right? I tell them take selfies or do whatever it is you're going to do. I tell them to look around at the details and see the people who are here and how they are dressed. Just take that in for a moment while I talk to gathered family and friends.

I say Family and friends, you are gathered here today for a purpose. You're here today to speak blessing over this couple. You're here today to hold this couple accountable. You're here today to pray over this couple. You were handed a card on your way in and when you receive this card, we would like you, throughout the day, to rejoice, delight, and praise this couple. And then I share with them how you rejoice, delight, and praise the love of this couple.

As they exchange their vows, there are going to be moments that spark in you a "Woo." Write it down. Write down your rejoicing, delighting, and praising. There are three ways you can use this card today, after you write in it. For some of you, you're going to have a hard time finding your keys to go home, so we can't let this card leave the building. We have a more than wine box set up out in the lobby or in the reception hall. We want you to take this card that was written on the day of their wedding and we want you to put it in that box because. Throughout their first year of marriage, they are going to reach into that box and just pull out cards and be encouraged with what you spoke over them at their weddings. In that box we are going to put a USA Today newspaper because they are probably not been checking out the news. They don't really know what's going on in the world, but they can catch up a year later to see what happened on the day of their wedding. And in there is a bottle of Welch's Grape Juice that they can pop open and enjoy and sip on. We want you to leave this card in the back and 50, 60, maybe 100 of you will do that.

There is a second group of you in here. We would like you to take this card. We would like you to hold onto it. We would like you to put a stamp on it for their first anniversary. We would like you to send it to them to remind them what took place on this day.

Then there is a third group of you in here. You're like my mom. I can go to my mom's house tonight and ask her if she remembers a picture I drew in 1986 and she will go into another room and come back about a minute and a half later with the picture that I drew in 1986. She keeps everything. In this third group... I'm hoping it's many of you. I want it to be both sets of parents. I want it to be the groomsmen

and the bridesmaids. I want you to hold this card and I have permission from the couple for you to do this. When you hear this couple is considering divorce, put a stamp on it and send it in the mail. When you hear they are going through a difficult time, remind them of their vows that they took before you and Almighty God. You send it to them and if you can't, you can leave it with us at the church and we will hold on to it until we know that something is going on. We want to bless the marriage.

We are creating a lot of these cards that will have a lot of different messaging. My goal is to hand 12 of them to Mom and Dad over here and 12 of them to Mom and Dad over there and say with all this messaging that we share on Twolgnite Sunday would you please send a card a month to your children for the first year of marriage. Again, it's learning how to be the backup singers to their marriage.

In the church, we have great pre-marital training and preparation for marriage. We have the day of the wedding and we say come back to us when your marriage is in crisis because we have a lot to offer. The first year of marriage is a critically important time. We have to capture that time. Most churches do nothing for newlyweds. This is one opportunity for you. You were handed one card on the way in, but maybe you have three or four children or you have friends and family, brothers or sisters. Maybe you fill out one of these cards for your parents and send it to them. You received one, but when you leave here today, at the Resource Center, you can grab as many as you need to grab. If you're having a wedding of 500 people in the next couple of weeks, you may want to ask us to order you some, but don't take 500 today. We want to make sure everyone has enough. How can you use this card? Let me give you a few of them as we close out our time.

### **Preparing for marriage.**

Maybe you know a couple that's dating and you just want to be one voice that comes into their life. With me, I don't want my 14 year old daughter to come to me one day and go "Dad, I think I'm in love" and respond with "No you're not! He is of his father the devil and a child of darkness; you stay away from him. He is evil. He has bad intentions." That desire that has been placed in them by Almighty God and it's a way that we can begin to encourage them and bless them. So maybe you know a couple that's getting ready to get married.

### **Attending a wedding.**

Maybe you can just take it with you to a wedding. Don't fill it out on the way there and just rush through it, but maybe during the wedding, you write the card out and you bless them while you are attending a wedding.

### **Encouraging a newlywed.**

You have engaged couples the day of the wedding a newlywed couple.

## **Celebrating an anniversary.**

If you have a family member's anniversary coming up, this, again, is kind of a take on the honor list that we shared on Mother's Day and Father's Day.

## **Helping through crisis.**

I also want to encourage parents. Bless your children, even the ones who are going through crisis. You may feel that at that point, you need to stay out of it and let them work it out. I'm going to ask you another question. What do you have to lose? What do you have to lose as your kids begin to separate, as your kids begin to divorce? I know many parents who do nothing because they don't know what to do. They don't know where to take it.

## **Don't let attacks on your past attempts keep you from reaching out now and in the future. Continue to back up their marriage.**

Don't let reminders of your past mistakes keep you from trying again. Do you remember when you got into it years ago and words were exchanged and it was harsh. His mercies are new every day. Don't let that keep you from starting to do the right thing now.

## **Don't let anger from a hurting family member keep you from loving and caring for them.**

You will experience this. They may say "It's none of your business!" "But out!" "Stay out of my business." Don't let that keep you from loving and caring for them. Go after them.

You're like "Ted, I'm not a writer; I don't know what to say or what to do." Come on to our website and we'll have this. I want to just give you some ideas to get started on what you write underneath the "I rejoice, I delight, I praise." You can copy and paste these. Don't say Pastor Ted said or Woodland Hills said. Take these words and make them your own. This is you, Mom, blessing your daughter and son-in-law's marriage. This is you, Dad, blessing your son and daughter-in-law's marriage. Bless them. You can say things like this:

## **I desire to bless your marriage by speaking words of high value over both of you. Your marriage is important to me.** We put that on the inside cover to just get you started and the juices flowing.

## **I rejoice in how you prioritize your marriage by spending quality time together.**

I love that you take a date night every week and anything we can do to help you with that date night, let us be a part of it. Bring the kids over; we would love to be a part of it.

## **I delight in the way you speak highly of each other in public.**

We went out to dinner a couple months ago and when you held the door open for her and just the little pet names you call her; I love that. When I see that, it does something in me; it stirs emotions in me; it causes me to rejoice and to cheer.

**I praise your love and the commitment to your vows.**

I know it hasn't been an easy season and I know it's been challenging. I know this illness that you're going through... I know what you're going through with your son or with your daughter is tough and I know how much you love him and I know how much he or she are draining on the family right now and you are kind of centered around that right now, but I just want you to know you made a commitment to your vows and I'm proud of you through the difficult times for staying true to your vows.

**I rejoice in knowing you will be together until one of you lays the other in the arms of Jesus or until the Lord returns.**

Thursday afternoon, I sat in Panera Bread in Phoenix, Arizona with one of our elders, Jim Sedlacek, who moved last year. Jim is still in mourning over his wife. There we sat. We looked like two lumps on a log, sitting there talking about marriage, talking about Jim's life and what the Lord has done in his life. He is still seeking to bless and encourage couples.

**I delight in how you accept one another's goals, dreams, and plans for the future.**

I actually love how you guys work at that with each other. I love watching you ask each other questions. What is it you want to do? What is your dream? Dreaming is like life to a marriage. Dreaming breathes life into a marriage. Dreaming gives you anticipation and a future. If you have a new born right now, you'll get through that. You will sleep again. You will sleep together again. It will happen.

**I praise the example you have set for your children and your grandchildren.**

**I rejoice in how you enjoy life together.**

**I delight in how you esteem each other as highly valuable.**

If you note takers couldn't get any of this written down, just come on to our website and we will have it there for you in the notes. Just take this and hopefully it gets the juices flowing and you can begin to write personally to your children, to your brothers, to your sisters to bless their marriage.

I will end with this question. We talked about it at the beginning. When people think about your marriage, do they praise your love? Some of you need backup singers in your life. We have plenty of opportunities around here. We have home groups. Maybe you need a home group right now that you need to turn way up. You need to plug in, you need to sign up, and you need to get into a community of believers. You know when you go to work you're talking to the people who have been through a bad divorce and they are going to encourage you that divorce is like ripping off a bandage; get it done and get it over with quickly and then you can move on and enjoy life. You need backup singers that move you

towards the Lord, not away from him. You need backup singers that move you towards your commitment in marriage, not away from it. You need backup singers that will teach you and bless you as you honor, enjoy, and prioritize marriage even through difficult seasons.

Mom and dad, you get the opportunity to be that and I would encourage you to start with your own marriage. Is your marriage one...? This is what I told Amy. I have lots of issues in life and things that I'll struggle with and things I won't do well. I want my children to look at our marriage and one day say "We want that." I don't want my 18 year old or my 20 years old or my 25 year old looking at my marriage, going "Don't want that; we can have something better than that."

Mom and Dad, may your marriage be an example of the gospel of Jesus, giving to one another, sacrificing for one another. And may your children look at that. I can't think of a better backup singer than your kids. I can't imagine a better thing to hear. My daughter is 11 and she still calls me Daddy. I say "Corynn don't ever give me another thing in this world: another present, another gift; just never stop calling me Daddy."

Nothing will bring me greater joy than when she's 30 years old, if the Lord continues to leave me here, for my daughter to go "Daddy, I rejoice in you and I will praise your love more than wine." I'm working towards that and my encouragement is for all of us to be a great backup singer. Let's look at our own marriage and for those of you who are single, I pray right now you start finding the backup singers, the people that will bless you and speak words of high value over you and over what you're feeling and over what's driving you.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for this morning. I thank you for Woodland Hills Family Church backing up the marriages and the duets of this community. Give us wisdom and words to say to bless husbands and wives and sons and daughters in this. I just pray this week we are on the lookout for those marriage that we can rejoice and delight and praise. I pray we start with our own marriage, that we would be a marriage that stirs those good emotions in others.

We love you and we are grateful for what you are doing in this church. Please continue to use this church and this community.

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