



Twoignite
Part 10 – The Grown Up Marriage
Pastor Ted Cunningham

This is the last Twoignite message of 2015. We're talking about *The Grown Up marriage*. We're talking about marriage being for grown-ups. If you are brand new to our church, we have so many guests each week who wonder why this church talks so much about dating. If you are single... We get this a lot. One lady this week said "I've been there four times; it seems like you talk too much about marriage." You need to know that our desire is to honor marriage in this church. Our desire, knowing that 50% of the people who attend on a Sunday are single... We do not seek to marginalize singles. We just know that every single person in here is called to esteem marriage as highly valuable whether you're single or married, young or old.

Honor Marriage: "Marriage should be honored by all..." Hebrews 13:4

This is the very first idea that we have with our Twoignite messaging. Young or old, whatever your season of life, whatever your marital status, we believe you are called... Whether you are from a red state or a blue state, republican or democrat, whether you like Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump... We believe you are called to esteem marriage as highly valuable.

We've been at this now for six or seven years. One of the things I'm really excited about is that Valentine's Day in 2016 falls on a Sunday. And Focus on the Family has been very interested in what's going on here at Woodland Hills. They asked us to put together a sermon on what it means to honor marriage and so we did. This is pretty cool. We are still two months away from February 14, 2016, but on that Sunday, I'm going to preach a message that came out of this church. Over the years, we've compiled it and put it together, but it was written out of this church. So far, 2,000 churches in the United States will be preaching that same message on February 14. We are hoping for 5,000 churches that will take a whole Sunday to esteem marriage as highly valuable because they see it as valuable.

Enjoy Marriage: "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love..." Ecclesiastes 9: 9

We also believe marriage should be enjoyed. This was #52IN15 – quality couple time. We believe you should enjoy life your wife, whom you love. We don't believe you should choose between marriage and life. We believe if you are in a stuck marriage, there are all sorts of ways to get help and to find joy in marriage again. You don't need to bail on it to find someone else to enjoy life with. You can have it with the person you are with right now. If you are in a blended family or second marriage, we ask this be your last marriage. We ask that you make this your best... We want you to learn how to enjoy marriage.

That's why we are doing the DateNight Comedy Tour next month. We used to do this thing called Love and Laughter. We did that five years in a row. We took a year off. We're mixing it up. You can still get a great room rate at the Chateau. Call them directly and tell them your with Woodland Hills; there's a code. You can get a \$69.00 room rate on January 16. We are doing the DateNight Comedy Tour here in the main auditorium. I get to host it, but John Branyan out of Indianapolis, Jason Earls out of Dallas, and Paul Harris out of Arkansas are going to be here. Let me tell you what's going to happen on this night. This event is two hours. I love how one husband put it a couple of months ago. He said, "The DateNight Comedy Tour... When I left, it felt like I had done over 300 crunches." These are three of the funniest guys you'll ever meet in your life and you'll have a ball. If you can only do the DateNight, do the DateNight, but if you can make it a weekend, get a room at the Chateau. They are filling up fast, so make sure you get one and enjoy your time there with each other.

Prioritize Marriage: "A man leaves his father and mother..." Genesis 2: 24

This is what we are going to look at today: Prioritize marriage. Genesis 2: 24 says, "For this reason, a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and the two become one flesh." We believe there are two parts of that. The first part is "A man leaves his father and mother..." In other words, it doesn't say a child leaves his father and mother or an adolescent leaves his father and mother. It says man leaves his father and mother. The meaning behind this text supported by Jesus and the apostle Paul is that you would leave your home prepared for your own home. There was no gap, throughout all of history and biblically, between leaving your parents' home and starting your own home.

Today we do have a gap. I've quoted Ryan Pannell for years on this. He says this it's called "prolonged adolescence" in many cases. It's where we've taken this extended break from responsibility. Ryan defines prolonged adolescence as too much privilege and not enough responsibility. These milestones that come with leaving your father and mother... We believe there are five milestones that have been true in every generation. Whether you're 18 and single or you're 80 and your thinking about your grandparents. If you're at 80 or 90 years old and thinking about your grandparents today, these milestones that I'm going to share with you are the same milestones of your great-grandparents as they are of the 18-year-old sitting in here.

1. Leave home. We believe leaving home is a pretty big deal. You leave home which means you leave your parents' Friends and Family Plan, which means you leave your parents' bank account, which means you leave your parents financially, emotionally, relationally, physically, and if none of that works, geographically. Some of you know what a meddling or enmeshed family looks like. You're too close to mom and dad and your marriage has suffered. We believe the very first milestone of adulthood is leaving home and separating from mom and dad and being on your own.

We tell our 10 year old and 12 year old all the time "You will not be with us forever so plan accordingly." This is the goal of our home. We talk about them leaving all the time. We want them to know. Sometimes Amy feels like I'm rushing them a little bit. But I have such a strong desire as a parent for my children to grow up.

We were out this week. I told my son “I don’t have a desire for you to be an athlete, but I just don’t want you to be a wimp.” We were doing something athletic together. I said, “I can’t desire for you to be an athlete; I didn’t bless you with the genes necessary to be that, but I want you to grow up to be a strong man. And let me tell you; you have to leave my home. You’re going to be gone one day. You’re going to be off the payroll. I have such plans for the amount of money that I’m going to be saving once you leave.”

How many of you are enjoying spending the money you no longer spend on your kids?

2. Finish school or training. Do you want to jump ahead into adulthood like that? Offer to pay for this. Don’t expect mom and dad to cover the whole thing. Don’t go shooting hoops at college four or five hours a day. Get a job and help pay your way through. But you have to finish school, training, any vocational training, or an apprenticeship that you might need.

3. Find full-time employment. This is 40 hours a week, maybe 50, 60, or 70; that’s responsibility, not privilege. You have to be able to provide. I know my millennial friends have read a lot of books and it’s all about social justice and they want to give away everything they have. I tell my young friends who have read David Platt’s *Radical* and they feel like they have to give it all away... I have to remind them they have nothing to give away. I appreciate my young friends wanting to give away all their parents’ money, but a better way would be for you to earn something so you have something to give. Get a job. All the retired people are agreeing. They want you to work to pay your part of social security so they can get their checks for the next 20 years. That’s why they’re nodding. It’s nothing to do with you; I can tell you that.

4. Get married.

5. Start family. Do you know the difference between your great-grandparents and the young people in here today? Your great-grandparents did all five of these in a week. But what prolonged adolescence has done is take these five milestones and stretch them out 10 to 20 years. “I’ll leave home sometime in my 20s. I’ll finish school.” And this is still on track. A lot of people finish school in their early 20s. “I’ll find full time employment.” This is where I think a lot of young people get stuck today and I believe it’s an unnecessary delay of marriage. They get stuck on number three because they think that not only do they need to find full-time employment, but they also need to get established in their job, save money, get their first place... They feel like they need everything going and established before they do the last two.

The reality is look around here at all the old people. There are a lot of old people in here. They didn’t wait to be fully established in life before they did four and five. They got married at a very young age, got pregnant on their honeymoon, and they started working. They started to mature. They understood if they were going to be successful in life and successful in marriage, relationships, and work, they were going to have to provide and pursue responsibility and mature. They knew it couldn’t be about privilege.

I love telling this story. When I was 22, I went to Fremont, Nebraska, and asked my 6'2" Norwegian now father-in-law if I could marry Amy Freitag. He responded in this thick Norwegian accent "You betcha." Amy had one year of school left at Liberty University. I told him I would only do it if he would let me pay for her senior year of college. He said, "You betcha."

Let me tell you how I did that. It was multiples of number 3. It's the only way to do it. My mom gave me my first cell phone and it was this box with this antenna out of it. She handed it to me and then she goes "You have ten minutes a month." How many remember those days? It's emergency only. I carried that thing around and I was awesome. I had my first cell phone, but I didn't have the caramel macchiato everyday and the iPhone 6 Plus. You can't do it all and it's okay. Don't wait until you have the latest version of the iPhone and everything in order. You don't have to wait until you are 30.

There's something better you can do and it's what the whole point of the message is today. You can make the decision to grow up. You can mature. This is not just to young people. There are a lot of married people in here today that need to make the decision to grow up. I've thought about that term a lot this week because when you say "grow up," it has a condescending tone to it and I'm trying to think of a better way to say it. If you think of one, tweet me and we'll post the second service.

These milestones are the first half of Genesis 2: 24. Leaving your father and your mother relationally, physically, emotionally, financially, and if necessary, geographically. Then it goes to the second half and here's the second half. "...the two become one flesh." I want you to think about those five milestone for a second and think about your marriage trying to become one flesh. Ask yourself the question: "Is there anything on that list of five that is keeping you from becoming a one-flesh marriage?" Are you too attached to home? I'm shocked at the number of guys that I still have to say this to in my life. Number 1 is still a problem for them. When they have a big moment at work, the first person they call is not their wife. The first person they call is mom. NO! Your mom is not the number one lady in your life. Your wife is, so you need to leave home.

There are others in here that your marriage has struggled from day one because your husband refuses to work. We deal with this a lot in Branson. People come to town looking for the perfect job and they are holding out for a management position. Let me tell you... Get any job until the management position comes along. Or, get any job and work yourself into a management position. But get a job!

The two become one flesh and Jesus backs this up. Look what he says in Matthew 19. "So they are no longer two, but one" when you get married. "Therefore, what God has joined together..." When you stand at an altar and exchange vows and rings, you're doing that before gathered witnesses, yes, but you're doing that before God Almighty. What God has joined together, let no man separate.

Character Creates Compatibility

Here's what we believe at this church about becoming one. It's a really simple idea. We believe that character creates compatibility. Compatibility in marriage is not something you find, you test for, you discover, or you stumble into. Compatibility is something that grows out of your character. I don't believe marriage is hard. I believe character development is hard. That's what's hard. Sometimes

character development being difficult puts a bad name on marriage because we are looking at our spouse and saying, "This marriage is so hard, I'm going to end this marriage and go be by myself because character development by yourself is so much easier."

Character trumps compatibility. I changed out the word *trumps* because the word *Trump* is tripping so many of you up these days. I can't use the word *trump* in talks anymore. Anytime I use it, the whole talk is lost. So character creates compatibility, but character also trumps compatibility. Character is more important.

So where are you at in your marriage? I believe there are five levels of maturity. I put this out a couple of months ago. I think it was a tweet. I just simply said "The longer I work with couples, the more convinced I am today that prolonged adolescence is a leading cause of divorce." I didn't say it was *the* leading cause of divorce; I said it *a* leading cause. It's a husband and a wife not wanting to live the grown up lifestyle. The first response I got to that tweet was "Marriage is hard. I don't think this is a fair statement. We're not all brats." It was something like that. I was thinking *Thank you for validating my primary tweet there.*

I sit down with couples and I listen to them and I'm thinking how what they are saying is not the language or the heart of an adult. There are times I meet with couples and I feel like I'm negotiating with toddlers. The reasoning they try to give me is what I get out of my five year old. When is the last time you tried reasoning with a toddler. Has anybody done that lately? That isn't easy. I love the parents who try. In stores, I love to hear a mom with a kid who should have had a nap three hour ago. The kid is melting down and the mom is going "Use your words." No. Spank him, put in the car, and get him home to a nap. First it was gun control and now it is corporal punishment. You can tell we are fighting hard not to have to go to a third service at Woodland Hills Family Church.

Character creates compatibility so I just want you to be honest. I put this out there as four and someone gave me a fifth. I love it when you help me write message; it makes it a whole lot easier. But which of these five statement, when it comes to character, compatibility, and the five milestone of adulthood, best represents you. Don't look to your spouse. They are written in a way you don't have to even look to your spouse. "This describes me in my marriage." This is individual. No throwing elbows.

1. We were mature when we married. That isn't true of Amy and me. But let me tell you, there are couples in here that is true of. Do you know why it's true? I married a couple that hadn't even hit 20 years yet, but life circumstances gave them no choice but to grow up. They lost their parents at an early age. At 13 years old, he was responsible for siblings younger than he was. By the time he was 19, he had lived more life in six years than most of us live in 20. The weight of responsibility was so great on him. As I met with this couple not even 20 years old, I felt like I was talking to a 50 year old seasoned couple. This is the first point, but it was the one I was given by a couple in our church who said, "We were mature when we married." But now for the other 99% of us, which of the next four fit you?

2. We were immature when we married, but grew up together. This is where the seniors are saying "Yeah, a farm will do that to you." Put a newly married couple on their own land and they don't have a

choice. You say, "We have a good marriage now, but boy it was touch. We made the decision to stick together, stick it out, and grow up together."

3. We were immature when we married; I grew up and my spouse did not. We are getting now to the painful marriages. I hope you see that we are going from easy to very difficult. This is a challenging one because you're like "When we had children, I was the one who took the majority of the responsibility for the kids." I think one of my favorite country songs is by Paul Overstreet. He sings that song that goes "Daddy's come around to momma's way of thinking." Isn't that a great song? Let's sing it.

*Daddy's come around to Mama's way of thinking
No more staying out all night a' drinking*

Giving up drinking all night is not only part of maturity, but it's part of being a Christian. Just want to make sure everybody gets that. Drunkenness is forbidden in the scripture.

*Every thing's better on the home front now
They're meeting in the middle, working it out
He finally figured out he's got something worth keeping
And Daddy's come around to Mama's way of thinking*

4. We were immature when we married; my spouse grew up and I did not. If you can say that's you today, that's a huge step towards maturity. If you can say, "She grew up a lot faster than I did. I've been on her heels, but I'm there..." Or the other way around. "He grew up so much faster than I did, but I'm right there behind him."

5. We were immature when we married and we still are. This is probably the most painful marriage and this is why we have counseling at Woodland Hills Family Church. If you can admit that, it's huge. And for the morning, that's it. We'll take you further and deeper into the scripture, but if you can say that, we are on to something. I want you to know throughout all the scripture this idea of maturity is strong – the idea of growing.

Here's what we love about our walk with Jesus. For me, I am more concerned about the future than I am looking at the past. I think about things I said and did back then. I want to see progress in my life. Do you want to see progress in your life? Do you want to see progress in your marriage? Do you want to see growth?

I was thinking about it this week just in terms of Woodland Hills. Some of you have been here since day one, going on 14 years. I was thinking about you, Pat. You've heard me say a lot of dumb things, haven't you? Don't be so quick to answer that. Thank you, Pat for that. Take your time and think through a really gracious response there. But you're not as concerned about the dumb things, although you remind me of them sometimes, as you are that I'm learning from that. I would hope that I'm not the same person at 41 that I was at 27. That's what we're talking about with progress.

Here's what Jesus said about becoming a Christian. I want you to see this progress throughout the scripture. "Unless you turn and become like little children..." So we begin in the faith. We humble ourselves. We recognize our need for a savior. "Jesus, you're the one; it's not me." We put away our self and we put him on the throne. But you have to become like a child or "...you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." That's how you enter the kingdom. Jesus used a child as a prop.

Now look what it says in Hebrews 6. "Let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity." It's not that the doctrine of Christ is not important, but there are some basic fundamental teachings of Jesus that should be a part of our everyday life, that should become the overflow of our life. We know what Jesus taught and we know how we should live, and when we're facing a situation or circumstances are coming at us, we are able to respond like Jesus would. Again, we are not Jesus, but we should be growing into the likeness of Jesus and we want to be maturing and you should see that progress. If, 10 years after you profess faith in Jesus or 20 years after you profess faith in Jesus, you are still needing to learn the elementary teachings of Christ, my encouragement to you is it's time to grow up in the faith. You need to press on to maturity.

He says in this text "Let's not lay again the foundation." The writer of Hebrews is saying, "I feel like we are coming back and again laying the foundation. As we lay this foundation, you should have already grasped this. You should be living this out in your everyday, ordinary walk around life, but, again, we have to continue to lay the foundation". So there's this idea of pressing on and going on to maturity.

We read about this in Philippians as well. "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 13. He speaking in the context... It's the love chapter. You read the love chapter often at weddings. You're going to get it a lot on Valentine's Day on cards and even commercials. This is in the context of spiritual gifts. It's in the context of the gifts of the Spirit. Again, remember that in scripture, we only have two seasons of life. We have childhood and adulthood. You went from being a child to being a man. You went from being a boy to being a man. You went from being a girl to being a woman.

It was in 1904, just a hundred years ago, that we created the term adolescence and we put a gap between childhood and adulthood. I don't argue a lot on that gap between being a child and a man because counselors go at my throat, but I do argue against that gap growing larger and larger. Prolonged adolescence... We need to be bringing that back down. Instead of coddling our young people, we need to be challenging them. "It's time for this responsibility to become yours. Here you go. Take it and run with it. We believe you can do this."

That's what I love about this text. It really explains the difference between child and adult. "When I was a child, I spoke like a child..." This whole outline could be a great series. Wouldn't it be fun to do a whole morning on what it's like to speak like a child? "...I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." When I grew up, I decided I can't think and I can't

speak and I can't reason (or the lack thereof) like I did when I was a child. It's time for me to step up. So let's look at this outline quickly in terms of our marriage and in terms of growing up.

Speaking

If you have children, this will be easy to understand. I encourage you to use this to teach your children what it means to take on the responsibility of adulthood. Children love to use the terms "I" and "me." But when you become an adult, you start using terms like "you" and "we" and "us."

I'm always saddened when I hear couples say "That's her/his thing; it's not my thing." But when you get married and two people become one, you have to have some stuff that's about "we." This isn't my ministry or my vision or my dream or my goal. This is ours. We're doing this together. We're prioritizing this together.

Years ago, I was at an anniversary party in this town. I always love small towns because whenever I get a story like this, people are going to spend the rest of the time trying to figure out who I'm talking about. You're not going to figure it out. I'm going to try to hide it by changing a few of the specifics. They were married 40 years. It was their anniversary party and everybody was gathered around. To be very blunt with you, everybody pretty much knew this couple didn't have a great marriage. It wasn't a shock or a secret. We all went to the anniversary party thinking *I can't believe they made it this long with the way they treat each other.*

They did a toast about halfway through the party. I was thinking it was going to be bad. The wife stood up to do the toast. She said, "Do you know how you make it forty years? You need to let him have his thing and you have your thing. He goes and does his thing..." This couple had jobs and businesses and all that that kept them apart most of the time. "He does his thing and you do your thing and that's what makes a happy marriage." I thought to myself how sad that was.

I was telling the kids this week... Have you ever had this issue with children where you're trying to figure out what you want to do today? You throw an idea out there and they say, "Oh, I don't want to do that!" I hate this word with everything that's in my being when we are trying to figure out where to eat or what to do for the day.

Tonight we are going to Silver Dollar City. We are taking hundreds of volunteers. We're looking forward to this night. It will be more like Singing in the Rain than White Christmas, but we are going to have fun. I told the kids "When I walk into Silver Dollar City, do you think I'm there for me? Have you ever once, when you say 'Hey, can we go down to the Flooded Mine?' heard your dad say... Just once, when you ask to go to the Flooded Mine, I'm going to be like 'NO! I DON'T WANT TO GO TO THE FLOODED MINE!' Try it sometime and watch your kids look at you like "What is your problem?" My problem is right there and why it looks so weird is I'm an adult acting like a child.

We're at the table trying to figure out what to do and one of our kids is saying "I don't want to do that" and "I don't want to do that" and "I don't want to do that." I finally told them to ask their mother how

much stuff I do around here that I really don't want to do. Amy had a perfect response. She goes "Pretty much everything he does."

Can I just take a break right here and help husbands through the Holiday Season? When it comes to decorating your home, this is a season to shut your mouth. You have no opinions on how many lights, how many trees. If she wants them hung from a 150-foot tree, you're going to hang lights from a 150-foot tree and you're going to do it with a smile on your face. Don't you dare think about falling off that ladder. I've been there where you're like *I could end this really quick*. That's terrible; don't even need to be joking about that.

Here's what compatibility is. Compatibility doesn't work with children. If you've ever been at a playground. Compatibility is difficult on a playground because you have a bunch of "I's" and "me's" running around. Compatibility works in marriage when your speaking becomes words like "you," "we," "us."

"What do you want to do?"

"All I want to do is what you want to do."

Amy knows my passion in life. I have one passion in life now. It's been my passion for years and it was escalated in April. My passion is three simple words: Table Rock Lake. That's my passion. I could live on that lake. I love that lake. I love everything about it. When friends ask when I'm going to leave Branson and go do something bigger and better, I'm like "Why don't you come with me just for a day on Table Rock?" About halfway through the day, they get it. It's pretty awesome out there. You take them out there at sunset. It's perfect.

I believe Table Rock Lake is a 12-month a year recreational lake. That's my opinion. You can be out there any time you want. My wife doesn't believe that. But boating has become a big thing for Amy because it's a big thing for me. She loves it. I brought a picture of the last time we went out together on the boat. She's covered from head to toe with a blanket. This is quality couple time right here. Quality time on Table Rock Lake for Amy means over 85 degrees with water temperature of at least 78 degrees. But she does that right there for me. Do you know what that does for me? For one, it makes me want to say, "What do you want to do?"

Amy is a foodie. I'm not a huge foodie, but what's awesome is I'm becoming a huge foodie. Why is that? It's important to her. My favorite restaurant, La Cracker Barrel, is not her favorite restaurant. I try to tell her how the biscuits are homemade which means they are better for you because they're not some frozen thing. They roll them out fresh. So when it's fresh... She is always talking about how we have to have fresh food around the house. When it's fresh, I can have as many as I want. But that goes back to the speaking. That's the "we" and the "us." We are becoming compatible because I do things that are outside of my likes and preferences and comfort zone. She does things she doesn't like and that is out of her preferences and comfort zone. And the two of us are finding great adventure together in that. We are also finding new things we enjoy doing together.

Two weekends ago with Joe White, we were driving on a long road trip. If you're ever in the car for two hours with Joe... We solved so many of the world's problems. We fixed everything. But then Joe asked me to tell him what my dream for marriage is. I started giving him all these ideas and thoughts and we were brainstorming. Then in just one statement, Joe says this and it ends the conversation because it's all that needs to be said. He said, "If you want to fix the marriages of the world, you only have to do one thing. You just have to eradicate selfishness." What do you say after that? That's it.

Thinking

Then there is also the thinking because our words come out of our thoughts. So with thinking, with a child it's "mine," but now with an adult it's "yours."

So is there anybody here who has had a fight over money? Men, husbands, I just helped you with Christmas lights, so now let me help you with the bank account. Here's what you need to say to your wife. "Honey, do you know what the bank account is? It's yours. I don't want it. And I'm going to get up every day and go make the money and put the money into your account." There's no insincere applause on that one is there? No one's applauding that.

We do bets around the house sometimes... I think we got this off a sitcom. A piece of cheese falls on the floor. I go "I'll pay you \$20.00 right now if you eat that cheese." Just joking type things.

Amy reminds me that it's all hers. She says, "If I want \$20.00, I'll just go to the ATM and pull out \$20.00. I'm not eating a piece of cheese off the floor."

Since I've started calling it her account, we don't have money fights anymore. I go online and I look at the spending and it stresses me out a little. But it's hers; it's not mine. "This house is yours; how do you want to decorate it? Tell me what you want." We have a small tree and I put 700 lights on it yesterday. That's because it's her tree. It ain't my tree. "This is your house, your tree; what do you want. It's all yours." She argues that it's mine, but do you know what that does? Once the account became hers, she didn't like spending money as much. I can't explain it, but I believe that's how God's economy works.

Reasoning

Do you know what reasoning is? Reasoning is the ability to think through something in the logical, sensible way. It's why you can't reason with a two year old. They are not thinking things through. They're not like "Dad, I know we're going to Silver Dollar City later tonight; do you think it would be wise if I took a nap? I think if I got some sleep, I would be in a far better mood until 8:00 tonight." The reason your kid doesn't think that way is because he's thinking about now. He's thinking about this very moment; how he feels right now, what he wants right now, what's going to make him happy, what's going to make him mad. It's all about the now. But when you become an adult, you're thinking about later. We're all thinking how we're going to be in the rain at Silver Dollar City tonight so we will need a nap. You see, adults think through things. We are able to think through a day. Adults think through a week.

Adults with a \$20.00 bill in their hand have a very different reasoning than does a five year old with a \$20.00 bill. I'm just shocked... I meet with a lot of couples and they tell me money is the issue and you realize the reason why is one of them thinks about money like a child. They haven't grown up in the area of responsibility with finances and so they want to spend everything they have right now. An adult says, "I have \$20.00 and four days until payday which means I have \$5.00 a day to spend."

We practice this on vacation. The kids have a certain amount they are going to spend on vacation and you try to tell them they don't have to spend it all on day one. "We're going to be here five days; you might want to spread it out a little bit." You know that great moment of joy when you give \$10.00 to a kid for spending money on a week's vacation and their first thought is *I don't want to spend it*. This is when the angels in heaven start dancing. This is when you realize your kid is getting it. Or when they decide they are going to look at everything and then at the end of the week, they will spend a little bit on the one thing. That's now a child who is becoming an adult and they are beginning to think things through verses the five year old who walks up to the first kiosk at Disney World, buys something, and then at the second kiosk, their distraught because they don't have any money. They don't have the ability to think things through logically or with some sort of sense. We do this as adults physically, financially, and emotionally

We had a party to go to last night which means a lot of social energy going out, a lot of relational energy going out. I realized I couldn't talk to anybody for two hours prior to that. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? You have to save something. This is why some of you are like "I'm here this morning, it's the biggest thing I'll do all day; I'm sitting down and napping the rest of the day." You spent time figuring out how you were going to do church today. We do this physically, financially, and emotionally.

The last two weeks, we went hunting with Joe. It was my first time hunting ever. Again, we are going to give one more reason for someone to leave. I was excited to go. My dad took us fishing. I don't even own a gun, but I'm going to change that now that I've announced that to crazy people in Branson. But I was excited. Joe trained Carson all year. We would go and practice shooting. He started with a 22 and then he worked up to a 243 on a target. Then two weeks ago was our big time to go hunting and we were ready. I didn't realize the moment we were going to be able to have with the now and the later, but here's us in a blind. Carson is looking out of this blind. For the first hour, there was nothing. He's like "What's the matter? Why do we not see anything?" He thought that you go sit in the blind, wait a couple of minutes, the deer comes out of the woods, you shoot the deer, you go get it, and we're back drinking hot chocolate by 8:00.

There was no greater joy than waking him up at 5:00 am and it's 32 degrees and rainy in Oklahoma. He goes "What are we doing?" I told him to get dressed to go hunting. "What!?" I told him to get up and get dressed. It's freezing cold and it's raining. We went into a blind and we had a little portable heater, but the guy that was with us said it wasn't cold enough to need a heater.

Carson is looking at me like "Turn the dang heater on." I'm sitting there the whole time thinking *Thank you, Lord*. "Carson, I apologize to you as your dad that I don't get you up every morning at 5:00 am and send you out into the cold rain to farm something or to milk something to bring something in." This is what made people grow up so quickly.

We got in the blind at 5:30 and he's slouched down in the chair. He thought it was horrible. He's like "What are we doing? Is there Wi-Fi in this blind?" There's no plugs, no Wi-Fi, no technology. I handed him the binoculars and he's looking for the deer. The sun came up and that morning wasn't productive, but that afternoon we were back in the blind. We had like a three-hour nap followed by a good lunch. I love hunting in the afternoon. After a nap and good meal, his deer walks out of the woods. Not being a hunter and not ever firing on an animal... I know this is not good in the blind. I'm dancing around the blind, trying to be quiet, but getting the gun and making sure nothing happens. I sat the gun up for him and I took the safety off and I said "Take your shot; this is it! This is the moment!"

I kid you not; Carson goes "Dad, settle down." He looked in the site and as I put my fingers in my ears, he made the shot. Ten minutes later, we're taking a picture of him with his deer. How's that? Don't be so naive to think that all of the animals down at the Bass Pro Shop died of natural causes.

We had a worship service down at the creek over this deer. I told him I was so proud of him. I said, "Carson, this is a huge moment. You became a man, not just because you... We didn't come shooting..." I was told that in Missouri for every eight times you go out hunting, you shoot your gun once. I don't know if that true, but I said, "We didn't come shooting, we came hunting. You have to learn patience; you have to learn to wait. What if we hadn't gotten a deer at all this weekend?" He didn't like that idea. Now I have to take him hunting to a piece of land that has no animals on it. I have to show him. If you've spent more than four hours in a blind and have seen nothing, would you raise your hand? How many of you went back out? How many of you say your patience while hunting has paid off? That was half of them. The other ones may want to take some lessons or something.

But I said "Carson, that's the big deal. You're learning that everything is not immediate." I think that's one of the reasons you should take your son hunting and you should start them off where they're not going to get a ten-point buck. But you should start them off with how this takes patience and this takes time. We have some of the best conversations with no technology and no Wi-Fi and no heater.

I said, "Carson, this is it. Carson, part of you becoming a man means you move out of the now, the immediate, what's going to make you feel good and be happy right now. You've got to move out of that and realize there is something good later, but you just need to be patient and wait."

For my single friends, as we talk about compatibility, you can't end a message like this without talking about spiritual compatibility. If you are not yet married, date and marry a committed follower of Jesus. It's a great start towards maturity. Don't date someone who says, "I walked an aisle when I was six, but I haven't been in church for 10 or 15 years." No, date someone who has committed their life to Jesus.

There was a lady in our church last week from online dating. She went on four dates last week. One of the dates said, "Meet me at Level 2. I've arranged for valet parking." I'm sitting there in the office thinking *Yeah, after committed follower of Jesus, that's number two. Level 2 and valet parking...*

There's a big difference. Sometimes we can get caught up in the superficial and lose sight of the most important. Compatibility, if it does flow from character, which we believe it does, you want that character being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. And you want a committed follower of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul puts it this way. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers for what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

Some of you in here are married to an unbeliever and you didn't follow through on that. There's hope. Don't ever give up hope. As one pastor said for years, "Don't be against hope; it's a bet you'll lose every time." So if your husband is not a believer, let your maturity in Christ, let your character growing into the image and the likeness of Jesus Christ influence him.

We learn this in 1 Peter 3. "If any one of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words..." Ladies, let me repeat that: without words. "...by the behavior of their wives."

This idea of maturity and growing... Everything about our church and our ministry to couples is built around this idea of your character conforming to the image of Jesus Christ. Marriage 911 is a great ministry at this church that is led out by R.G. and Karen Yallaly. R.G. is one of our elders and has been for a few years now. They don't do marriage counseling; they do character development counseling. They don't meet with couples together; they meet with the husband alone and they meet with the wife alone. They help that husband and they help that wife know who Jesus is, know where, in their character and in their life, they need to be growing and maturing, speaking like an adult, thinking like an adult reasoning like an adult and not like a child.

Our challenge for you today... Don't leave here today discouraged or frustrated. Leave here today encouraged that there is hope. Your marriage has hope. Make the decision not to change the other person, but to work on you and growing up in your marriage. And all God's people said... amen

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time. We thank you for the blessing of the last year and all the couples who have been encouraged in their dating. I just ask that you continue to build into the quality couple time of this church. For the couples who have started this new habit, I pray that they won't quit dating. Whatever level of maturity a person is at in here today, I pray they identify that and make decisions to move forward, to grow up in their faith, to grow up in their marriage, to grow up in their family, to grow up in the workplace, and to begin thinking and speaking and reasoning like an adult and not like a child.

We are grateful for what you continue to do in this church. Use Woodland Hills to minister to many this season. Thank you for the generosity of this church and all of those families that are going to be blessed and ministered to from the Christmas tree. May we step up as a church and do even more than you've called us to do. We are grateful for this season. We wish each family a blessed time and may it be an encouraging time with their families and their children and their parents and their grandparents.

We love you and we are grateful for what you are doing here. It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.