



Twoignite

Part 4 – Good News for Your Marriage

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Twoignite Sunday. This is going to be a different morning because we are sharing a pretty big announcement. It's been almost seven years that we've been doing Twoignite Sundays. We started in August of 2009 and we were one of two churches. The other church was Mission Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona. We said let's get serious about the messaging of marriage and family within the church. We said we were going to take the second Sunday of every month and talk about marriage. That means this church has heard at minimum over 70 sermons on marriage over the last six and a half years.

The announcement is this. I'm just going to get it out there. I'm kind of a rip the bandage off type guy. I tell my kids "I could do this really slow... Hey look over there." Then you rip that thing right off. This is our last Twoignite Sunday on the second Sunday of the month.

Now let me tell you there are two extremes in this room. There are those who have been here since August 2009 and there are many in here that that news is a celebration for them. And we are okay with that. I want to try to heal this among us. There are some who have heard everything we could have possibly ever come up with on marriage and they've grown fatigued with it. I just want to say as your pastor that I get that. I understand. There are times when I'm preaching a Twoignite and I'm thinking that I'm sick of hearing it. I do marriage conferences and retreats and there are some talks I have given over a hundred times.

I have to be honest with you. I don't want to be the guy that has all these "push play" talks. I've seen the conference speakers. I'm sorry; I don't want to rip on conference speakers, but I've seen the ones where I know that they've given that talk a thousand times and the passion is kind of gone from the talk. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? It's okay to give the same talk, if you have a gospel presentation or whatever, a hundred times or so, so long as it's still something you believe and you have passion. But I've seen so many "push play" talks and I don't want to be that guy. I don't want our church to become that church.

There are some of you who have been here for six or seven years and you've enjoyed it up to a point. Now you attend because you're glad it's still able to help other people. We want to say thank you, Pat Kershaw. I think Pat is our oldest living member at Woodland Hills Family Church. The Huesteads don't come to the second service so... Pat, at 96 years old, has made the decision... Pat, you know I had to have some fun with this this morning.

So, I get there is this group of people. You have been with us and you can say you are a little fatigued. I love you and I don't need your emails this weekend of support and validation. You can save all that. You and I are very good.

I want you to also think of the person over here who started coming last month because of Twolgnite Sunday. There are many in here that like the marriage and family focus of Woodland Hills and are excited we are doing marriage. They are wondering what just happened here. We want you to know that we are still going to have Twolgnite Sundays; we just don't know when. We are going to announce them. We'll give you plenty of notice so those of you who are fatigued can stay away.

We want you to know we are still passionate about marriage and family, but there are two primary reasons we are doing this. One reason is freshness. When we said we were going to stop this on the second Sunday of the month, even for some of the staff, it was like mourning a death. Then it went to "Should we quickly come up with something else?" I want you to know this has been an elder decision. This is a staff decision. We don't need to have something to replace it right away. We feel we actually need the space right now for God to speak to us. We actually think that if we want freshness, we don't need to just force something else. We enjoyed the Date Night Comedy Tour in January and we're probably going to do that again at the end of the year. We enjoy all of that, but we just feel like "Okay, God, what is next for our church?"

It's not only freshness, but I feel like, as a leader, I need to lead out with this idea that purposes trump programs. The purposes of God don't change, but programs do. I also don't want to be that pastor doing Twolgnite Sunday when I'm 60 years old, 26 years later, with people asking me why I do it. I don't ever want the words to leave my mouth "because that's the way we've always done it." Those words are quick and slow at the same time, but they are death to a church. When a church starts saying, "It's the way we've always done it," it kills organizations and it kills churches. I'm constantly challenging the staff around here that before they start something new, consider something that we can kill. That's probably strong language, but it's not someONE... it's someTHING. I've always said there is nothing in the church that can't be fixed by a few deaths. Anyway... That's from my Baptist days. I'm just kidding.

If you think about it, you can't be this church that just keeps adding programs, never thinking about the programs you need to let go. In Branson, there are a lot of programs. There are a lot of ministries that people just keep going and going. I hear the sacred echo. The sacred echo is where God constantly brings this message back to you in all different forms. It can be as simple as you reading a verse in the morning... Margaret Feinberg wrote a whole book on this. Then you go to coffee with a friend and your friend starts to share with you what they read that morning and it's the same verse. That's the sacred echo. Or, you go over to your parents' house and look on their cat calendar and there's the verse. That verse or that message just keeps popping up everywhere you go. That's the sacred echo. A lot of this decision is the sacred echo. We know God wants to do something else. We don't know what next is, but isn't it something that we are also in a series called Next Step.

So, for those of you who are here saying, "We came because our marriage is hurting and now you're telling us this is going away," the program being on the second Sunday of every month is going away.

We don't know what next is. As God gives us messages, as he gives us a passion for different areas of marriage and family ministry, we are going to continue to share it.

I'm still going back to this big idea. When I felt God was calling me to do marriage and family ministry, I had I can't tell you how many friends and how many other pastors tell me "That's great; why don't you leave and go start a ministry?" This is what happened to Gary Smalley 40 years ago in Wako, Texas. When God gave him a passion for marriage ministry, it was the church's automatic thought for him to leave and go do that. We've said from the beginning that we think marriage and family should be something the church is about. We believe this can be a ministry of the local church and we don't need to leave and form another parachurch ministry. We can leave it in the church and do local church ministry.

We are going to kind of go on a recap of Twolgnite as we bring this second Sunday of the month ministry to close. We are going to look at what God has done over the last six and a half years, why we did it, and where we've been. This is kind of putting the final nail in the coffin... I can't think of a metaphor that's going to work on this, but you get what I'm saying. We're celebrating... because here's what the church doesn't do well. I've been in ministry for 20 years now. Whenever we let something go, we're not great at change. Whenever we let something go, we don't do what we do when we let a family member go. When we lose a family member, now days we set them up in an urn, but then we celebrate them. We speak words of high value over them. We honor them. We need to do that as we say goodbye to things that we know God has used, but he has something next. That's kind of what we want to do today.

In 2009, the Ullman Family Foundation was a big part of getting this kicked off. They sat down with focus groups, they did research and studies through the Association of Marriage and Family Ministries. They asked what's going on with marriage ministry and they asked people why they were not into it. They asked church members of churches all over the country, from all different walks of life, what they think about marriage ministry when they think of marriage ministry or when they see a marriage book or when they see marriage curriculum or when they are invited to a marriage small group. They asked them what comes to mind.

Out of all their research, these are the four words that they came up with: outdated, boring, preachy, and feminine. Men don't like going to marriage conferences because they are afraid they are going to be turned into women. Men tells they don't like going... And it's why we do the Date Night Comedy Tour. They don't want to go to another marriage conference or seminar where they are beat up for five or six sessions for not being women. "They tell us to cry and communicate more and we are a lousy husbands."

You see this in the television commercials. In most commercials, the wife is the smart one and the husband is the idiot. Is that true? Just watch how marketing works. You see the razor blades aisle at target or Walmart. They have all these creative names. For women, it's Venus Extra Light Touch and for men it's Mach 3, Turbo. It's all the same razor blade with different marketing.

It's also preachy. The men are getting tired of people screaming this at them. It's outdated because we feel like it's folks that have written books back in the 70s and 80s and they don't really know and

understand what's going on today. To be honest with you, people say they've heard it all. This is the part that kind of freaks me out a little bit. As we prepare new Twolgnite messages, we're going, "Okay, Lord, what do you have fresh for us," knowing culture has changed and it's been shifting quite a bit over the last two decades.

I want to share with you of the messaging we came up as a church. We really went with the six marriage trends over the last six and a half years. We call them marriage and family cultural trends. Our church said we're going to just tackle them and hit them head on.

1. The Kid-Centered Home

The first one we talked a lot about was the kid-centered home. We believe in eradicating the kid-centered home. It started around the 1980s. We shifted in our parenting. I've been having fun with it this week, thinking about parenting. How many of you grew up with parents who let you chew on cigarette butts? Yep. We're fine, but now we are the antibacterial generation. How many of you remember drinking out of garden hose? We did it all the time and we're fine. If you were shot with a BB gun, raise your hand? I'm convinced that if we let our kids start shooting each other again with BB guns, it would solve the crime in our country. I have no research to back that up.

I can remember growing up with my brother, Andy. We would set pop cans up in the back of our yard and we would shoot them all down.

Andy would go "Hey, go set them back up."

"Oh come on!" I knew setting them back up meant I was the new target. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? I'd try to convince him not to shoot me.

He'd say, "I won't shoot you."

As I was walking back to set up the cans I would hear him loading up the BB gun. But I'm who I am today because I've been shot multiple times with a BB gun and a pellet gun.

How many of you remember complaining to your parents about what you were having for dinner and then you didn't end up with dinner? How many of you remember when the dog became too much to handle, your dad came in and said the dog ran away? Those were good days. We used to sleep in the back window of the car on 12-hour trips. Then around the 80s, we switched to the kid-centered home and it all became about the kid. Then we said this is tearing our marriages apart and it's tearing our churches apart. Eradicate the kid-centered home.

2. Prolonged Adolescence

The kid-centered home led to this idea of prolonged adolescence – too much privilege and not enough responsibility. We told young people to take their time growing up. I love this story and you're going to hear some of these stories, but we're recapping.

At the Fox Valley Mall, trying on Lee Jeans for the last time with my mom. I walked out of the dressing room and she grabbed me by the front of the pants and asked how they felt in the crouch. "MOM! Knock it off! I'm 17 ½. We're not going to have any more conversations about my crouch." She never bought me clothes again. I got off my parents' Friends and Family Plan.

I grew up, like many of you did, with parents who expected you to leave. I think one of the greatest mistakes we make today is treating our children like children until the very day we expect them to be adults. We have a teenager come this summer and it's happening fast. I've told her that at 13, I'm declaring her an adult and I'm moving more into the monitoring phase of her behavior. I'm going to place the expectation of adulthood.

But we've slowed down the adulthood milestones of leaving home, finishing school, getting a job, getting married, and starting a family. The generation that went before us completed them in a very short period of time, if not the same week. We stretch them out. We're growing these out as long as we can. I believe prolonged adolescence is one of the leading causes of divorce in our country today. Young people not prepared for the responsibility of work and marriage. Over the last six years, we've tried to encourage young people to grow up, step up, and take responsibility for their life. There are plenty of adults around them who, instead of bashing them, need to be encouraging them by saying, "You got this!"

3. Delayed Marriage

Prolonged adolescence – the delay of the adulthood milestones – led to delayed marriage. This is where we experience the tone. It was the first time I was doing Twolgnite that I experienced this. They were entertainers in our town. He was getting ready to take a bunch of cruise ship gigs where he was going to be on cruise ships for like eight months. He was wrestling with getting engaged at 23 years old. It didn't even dawn on me... I didn't even think twice about the fact of him being too young. I got married at 22 and Amy was 21. My parents, her parents, her grandparents, my grandparents all had the "That's what you do when you're 22 and 21; you get married."

When he told me he was getting married, I said, "Congratulations! You get to spend the first eight months of your marriage on cruise ships? Who gets to do that? Good for you!"

We had them over for dinner for premarital counseling. We were eating and I'll never forget him looking at me and saying, "Hey, I just wanted to say thank you for congratulating us when we said we were getting married. You were the only ones in our lives that said that. When we announced we wanted to get married, everybody else was shocked and said 'Are you sure?' They said, 'Aren't you too young? Aren't you going to screw up the rest of your life? Shouldn't you go out and explore?'"

A lot of his Christian friends and Christian family said, "You should go enjoy the eight months on the cruise ships by yourself?"

I said, "I know what happens on cruise ships; you need to be married. And you need to go on the ship with your wife, not by yourself. That is a recipe for disaster."

It was fun this week. There was a country music artist that read Young and In Love a few years ago. He emailed me and said that same thing. He said, "Everybody is telling me I shouldn't get married. I should pursue my music career. Even my dad, who is a country music star, says I shouldn't do this. I want to get married. Am I too young? Should I not take her on the road?"

Now, when I listen to his songs, it is good. He's writing music and winning awards with his music because of his love for his wife. I have to be honest with you. It's like me and like three other pastors in the country who are encouraging young people to get married. Mark Gungor is one of them Al Mohler, at the seminary, is one of them. There are a few other guys that I can think of, but most pastors, when I start talking about this, are horrified. They don't want to go there.

A lot of the staff – and Stephanie Watson is one of them... She said, "For us to kind of crank down Twolgnite feels like we are going to lose a lot of ground that you have fought for."

I said, "I'm trusting that God has bigger plans than we don't even know about right now because we still believe in it."

4. Sliding vs Deciding

We believing in making decisions because decisions have power. Relationship formation milestones teaches you to make a decision and go with it. I wanted to marry Amy so I walked into the kitchen of 6'2", full-blooded Norwegian, pretty much a Viking, Dennis Freitag and I said, "I want to marry your daughter."

He said, "You betcha."

I said, "But only if you will allow me to pay for her senior year in college."

To which he said, "You betcha."

Young guys will say, "How did you do it? How can you afford to get married and pay for your own college at 22 and 21?" I had multiple jobs and I didn't have an iPhone 6 Plus and a venti Caramel Macchiato every day.

Discipleship, for me... I get really leery when people call me and ask me to disciple them and then ask to meet at Starbucks. We're not meeting at Starbucks because I think we do too much discipleship over coffee. We need to do more discipleship out where we're working, where we're doing stuff, reaching people. We turned discipleship into this "just read the Bible" thing. No, it's take the Bible and living out the Bible in your daily life. Walk with the Bible in hand, don't sit there and study it and act like it's just going to automatically change... No, you need to take it, read it, memorize it, study it, and then do something with it. Be doers of the word, not just hearers of it.

I tell the young guys that I worked and I gave all my money... I love talking to young guys about this, especially the ones that have student debt. They are taking on their student debt and then the student debt of their wife.

I'm like "Isn't this exciting. You get to take this on! You've got this! Are you ready for it?"

And they're like "No. I don't want it."

I'm like "Well, you've got this. You can do this. Moreover, if you tackle it, you take responsibility to get it done, you will learn and you will grow up and you will be disciplined and you will become what we call a man."

Around here, we call men the ones who will provide for a family, not walk away from the family. A man is someone who will say "I'll work however much I need, however many jobs I need to, however many hours I need to provide for a wife and children. If that means I wear the same pair of underwear for the next 20 years, I'll do it." I'm not saying that about me. I've had new underwear over the last 20 years. I'm not Bernie Sanders; I'm going to splurge on socks and underwear. That's Saturday Night Live.

Sliding is where we're just not going to make any decisions. We're just going to cohabitate, live together, and see how it goes. If that works out well, we'll get a dog together and maybe sign a lease together. I had a family member... It was kind of a joke in our family. He lived in Chicago in an apartment with his girlfriend and when the lease was up, the relationship was over. He would joke about it. He said, "I just thought it was a good time to end it. We'll go to the end of the lease, so on November 30, we're done." I don't think that's how it's supposed to work.

I remember him leaning over the car at my aunt's funeral... I'll just share. It was my cousin. He said, "Ted, I'm not going to get married until I can answer one question."

I said, "Greg, what's that?" So it's my cousin Greg.

He said, "Am I willing to spend the next six to seven years of my life with this woman?" This is a true story. You can ask my parents; they will verify all of this.

I told him, "You're a Cubs fan; you should know something about commitment in tough situations."

I don't know if you know this, but the divorce rate is very low for Cubs fans. I'm just making that up. I don't know.

5. Dating while Divorcing

This was a trend we tackled with people getting divorced and in the middle of the divorce... Maybe the papers aren't even drawn up yet and they are already finding someone new. Or, they're moving into divorce because they are planning to be with that person. We just said, "Please stop asking us to celebrate your new relationship while we're still mourning the death of your marriage."

6. Greying Divorce

Just when you thought grandma and grandpa's marriage was safe. The divorce rate for those over the age of 50 is now right around 28%. For the first time in history, we have more folks divorced over 50 than we do widowed. It's all the way from cradle to grave that we have to talk marriage and family.

Here is the verse we led out with and it's been the primary verse throughout all six and a half years. Hebrews 13: 4 – ***Marriage should be honored*** (esteemed as highly valuable) ***by all...*** Whether you're single or married, young or old. ...***and the marriage bed kept pure...***

I'm thinking about the one in here right now... I know some of you started off, for the first year or two, hating Twolgnite because you were single or a single parent or just going through a rough marriage. Then after a year or two, your heart began to soften and now you've become a champion for marriage. I can tell you story after story of those folks in here. That's one of the things the staff was concerned about. They said, "We fought so hard and we've got so many advocates for it now that to just drop it seems crazy." Again, we are trusting that the Lord has a plan for the future of our marriage and family ministry here at Woodland Hills. We don't know exactly what that is yet, but we are going to listen and we're going to be sensitive to it. But at this church, we will continue to esteem marriage as highly valuable.

About two years ago, we got into this idea that **every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers**. We were looking for a slogan for Branson and this worked. Remember we sang duets. R.P. sang islands in the stream with someone. They belted it out. The rest of us want to look for the duets around us and we want to find out how to be a great backup singer to those marriages. We've looked at how to help marriages in crisis, how to encourage a young couple that's getting married and be a good voice for them, congratulating them when they say they want to get married.

We also said we also need to think about the backup singers that are in our lives and in our duets. Some of them are taking you off key. They are the ones you need to mute. They are the ones that are constantly bringing you down in marriage and you need to say, "We can't be around them anymore. We don't need to go out for drinks on Friday night with that couple anymore because they are so jaded towards marriage."

When your marriage gets in trouble, you know the person you call. You typically call the person who says what you want to hear. But we said good backup singers say what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. We also talked to parents a lot about how to be a good backup singer to your adult child's duet. The big idea there was to make sure that you are advocating for their marriage, not just your child. We got that from the Song of Solomon 1: 4 that says **We rejoice** (we celebrate) **and delight in you, we will praise your love more than wine**. We want to gather all the duets in our life around us and make sure we are speaking blessing over them. We did that with the More than Wine box. Many of you gave that out as a gift.

5 Myths about Marriage

We could go through so many things that we've been doing as a church, but we want to jump, as we close out this Twolgnite, with five myths about marriage and we want to clear these up because we've dealt with these. We are going to deal with these with scripture this morning.

Myth #1 – Happiness should not be a goal of marriage.

You know this has been a passion of mine for a long time. This is a myth. Years ago, Gary Thomas wrote the book called Sacred Marriage that asked the question "What if God gave us marriage to make us holy more than happy?" People didn't even read the book. They saw the subtitle, they switched it around a little bit, and they came up with this subtitle. I've heard pastor after pastor... I can Google this and find many sermons with this title. "God gave you your spouse to make you holy, not happy."

I was reading one of my favorite authors the other day. He just kind of threw that one line into the book and I couldn't believe it. Can I just encourage you? Let me show you with this picture. This is a story from Relevant Magazine. We have to be so careful today. If you're getting your news from Facebook, stop. Those aren't accurate sources. If Walter Cronkite didn't say it, it probably didn't happen. If Peter Jennings didn't say it, it probably didn't happen. Isn't funny that today we get news and we have to check five or six sources to make sure that news is true. That's because we're not getting news anymore; we're getting commentary. We're not getting truth anymore; we're getting commentary.

If I can encourage you that as a Christian, as you scroll through your feed and see reputable sources, or what you think are reputable sources, please use discernment when reading articles and especially just reading titles. This title says, "Marriage isn't About Your Happiness." What's sad for me about social media today... I can go on any of my tweets right now and it will say "View Tweet Activity." If you hit that button, it says, "This tweet has been viewed 1,500 times. And this tweet has been interacted with or has had a click through 40 times. So, use discernment when you see titles that are provocative. This title is a provocative title. It's written so you would click through. The problem is that the majority of people aren't clicking through. They are seeing this and going, "Okay, marriage and happiness are at war. They shouldn't go together."

When you read a lot of these articles, they are so provocative that they were nonsensical. They don't even make sense. I feel like I've grown because I don't interact with these people anymore. I used to jump on things like this, but then I watched a lot of you that do that and decided I didn't want to be like you. Sorry. I don't want to be that angry, frustrated person always commenting on stuff, so I'll just do it in a service. All I'm saying is used discernment when you see provocative titles like this.

Here's the second pillar of Twolgnite Sunday. Ecclesiastes 9: 9 – ***Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.*** So, there's "enjoy life with your wife" and then "toilsome labor." A lot of times, we put these together, saying these are at war with each other. They are not at war with each other. Life is difficult. Life is challenging. Life is painful. The word toilsome actually means grueling, painful, and challenging.

Life is grueling and the 70 years you have upon this earth, 80 if your strong, are filled with sorrow and anguish according to Psalm 90: 10, but in the midst of this, choose to enjoy life with your wife. Again, decisions have power. It's a decision that you make to enjoy life. So, we've been challenging couples for the last couple of years to enjoy life together and this is our big idea and this started last January with #52IN15.

Prioritizing quality couple time says to family and friends "Our marriage is important." We are going to prioritize spending time together. Last year, we did #52IN15. Thousands and thousands of dates were recorded. The Wangs are going on a cruise. We've spent a lot of energy on this, encouraging quality couple time. I have to be honest with you. Last year was such a big year, so I started talking to elders about what we do with Twolgnite after #52IN15. We said that maybe it needs to come off the second Sunday of the month to do something new. We did start this year with #20in16 and this is still going to go strong. We are still going to be giving away gifts. We're still going to be bringing this up in services and in messages and online, giving out gifts. We want you to continue with your dream list, continue with your bucket list. We don't believe happiness and marriage are at war. We don't believe it's happiness verses holiness. We believe you can pursue both at the same time.

Myth #2 – Compatibility should not be a goal of marriage.

If I could show you another provocative title. If you spend any time online, this is what you'll find: "Pursue Complementarity, Not Compatibility." And this is the Gospel Coalition. This is if you're an Acts 29 guy... The Gospel Coalition is a network of very conservative, reformed theology guys. I look at this and, again, there was a lot of nonsensical information in this article. A lot of times, when the author of the article referred to compatibility, he really meant chemistry. Chemistry is attraction to one another, your personality blend.

When you read this your thinking compatibility is a bad idea in marriage and you shouldn't be pursuing compatibility. This is a myth. You should pursue compatibility. Compatibility is, again, a decision that you make. This is the third verse from Twolgnite. Genesis 2: 24 says ***For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother...*** This goes back to eradicating the kid-centered home and prolonged adolescence. We want our children to leave home as adults, not on a journey to become one. We are encouraging young people to step up and be a man. You don't need to wait until your 30s to take on the responsibility of adulthood. You can do it in your teen years. You can do it in your early 20s.

I speak every year at the Link Year and I share this verse. I love the response I get as I talk about prolonged adolescence and I challenge the young people that it's time to step up and take responsibility. Do you know how many young people come to me and say, "We want to, but our parents won't let us." That's something we need to be responsible for. We need to say we're not going to treat our children like children right up until the very day we expect them to be adults. This to me is the biblical definition of compatibility: ***and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.***

The biblical definition of compatibility is two becoming one. It's a decision that you make. You take your family of origin, which is quite messed up, isn't it? You take your spouse's family of origin, which is way more messed up than your family of origin. How many know what I'm talking about? You married

someone who has a far more screwed up family than you do and now you're trying to bring those families together. They wrote message on your spouse's heart for 20 years. They said the same things over and over again and eventually your spouse started believing it. Guess what? Messages were being written on your heart for 20 years and eventually you started believing it. Now you're going to come together and how do you become compatible? You make the decision to become compatible.

We believe you don't have to look for someone else to find compatibility. Some of you are saying, "I'm in a bad marriage right now and it's not possible. I need to go find someone I'm more compatible with." Stop looking for greener grass. Where there is greener grass, there's a septic leak. Stay away from it. Stay home and water your own lawn. For a good time, call home. Make the decision. You choose to become compatible. Your character trumps compatibility. Your character is the most important thing. From your character, you decide to stay married for life.

On Tuesday, the Hustedts celebrated 69 years of marriage. That was a choice they made to work through the difficult stuff, to work through the painful stuff, to work through the challenging stuff to be married.

You make that decision, but you also make the decision to become compatible. You don't walk away. This is what I'm afraid young people are hearing: "If we're not compatible, we will never be compatible." You can experience high levels of marital satisfaction with the person you walked in here with this morning. It's a decision that you make.

Myth #3 – Couples divorce over big issues.

That's not true. Couples divorce over little issues that they haven't dealt with. This is the Song of Solomon 2: 15. ***Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes...*** In that day, vineyards were protected by large walls. There would be these little tiny holes in the wall. The vintner would have to go around and check to see where they were. He would have to plug that hole up because if not caught, it would take just one little fox getting in and out of the vineyard at night to do major damage over just a couple of weeks. We want to catch those. ***...that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.***

Your marriage is referred to in the Song of Solomon as a vineyard. So, what little things do you need to deal with? It's the little things that we've looked at and worked on, like communication, the kid-centered home, and dealing with the little tiny seeds of unresolved anger and lust and all of that in your heart before they become big issues.

Shaunti Feldhahn, my friend who wrote the book *For Women Only*, also recently wrote a book called *Good News About Marriage*. In it, she covers a lot of myths. These last two myths are hers. She's done a lot of research on this. I want to end with this so that we are, again, clearly painting a beautiful picture of marriage, which is what we tried to do for the last six and a half years.

Myth #4 – Half of all marriages end in divorce.

We have to stop saying that. It's just not true. She actually puts the divorce rate, through her research and through her studying, at about 25%. We say 50% because someone just threw that out there and everybody took it like God gave you your spouse to make you holy, not happy. She is saying that the divorce rate actually peaked in the mid-80s and has been trending downward ever since. Why do we need to clear up this myth? It's because people see this myth and they use it as an excuse. They say, "It's not working out in our marriage, we're not compatible, it's okay to divorce because it's kind of trendy. Other people are doing it. Don't let this stress you out." Again, if you're here today and you're going through a difficult marriage, I want to encourage you to work through it. If you've been through a divorce, this isn't your time to go on a guilt trip. You need to start thinking about how to be a backup singer to the duets around you. If God is preparing a new duet for you, be prepared for that.

When we see that half of all marriage ends in divorce, we think that's just going to be typical, and we start to lose hope and we start to lose drive. We need to infuse marriage today with hope, not futility. The divorce rate is actually around 25% not 50%. She says that when people recorded 50% as the divorce rate, it isn't that half of all marriages taking place in wedding ceremonies across the country this year are going to end in divorce. That's not true. That divorce rate is calculated by the number of weddings in a given year versus the number of divorces in a given year. It doesn't mean that of the 100,000 people getting married this year, 50,000 of them will be divorced a number of years down the road.

Myth #5 – The divorce rate is the same in church.

She actually says this is a misleading concept. I said this early on. Again, I'm going off the research I have and have been given. The reason it's misleading... Barna has had to shore up some of his research. It's kind of like the research we hear that 70% of children, once they leave home, will also leave their faith. That's not a good number. That's not true, but how many youth pastors in youth conferences have you heard quote that number? That number is skewed, and here's why: When a kid graduates from high school, goes off to college, and they don't join a church at college, they are considered in that 70%. They haven't left their faith. They haven't left the church. Maybe they didn't join a church during college. They had to fix that research and Barna has cleared that up since.

This is another misleading study because, again, and we're talking about in the Next Step series. It's a misleading study in that just because a person is here this morning, that doesn't mean they are a devoted follower of Jesus. The divorce rate for those who attend church together, who pray together, who study the Bible together, who give together, who serve together is very low. Not just those who attend church from time to time, but those who claim a church.

You're going "Well, the church isn't doing a better job." This one always got to me because we are preaching as much as we can, as often as we can. We are encouraging couples the best way we know how, and we're still not gaining ground. Here's what I know as we end Twolgnite on the second Sunday of the month. I know we have gained a lot of ground. I can look around this room right now and see many, many marriages that have not only been saved, not only have been healed, but many that have

said, "We just had an okay marriage, but this has infused our marriage with not only great hope, but energy and joy and laughter."

We know that if you will commit to your spouse, commit to a church, and commit to your walk with Jesus, that's the greatest thing you can do for your marriage. We're in this series right now called Next Step. We will pick it up again next week with Part 2. I just want to end by encouraging you with this. How do we end Twolgnite? The greatest thing, the best thing that you could do for your marriage is to take another step toward Jesus. Be a part of this series over the next couple of weeks and find out what you need to do individually, what you need to do as a couple to get more involved, to serve, to give, to not just be a part of the crowd, but to take the next step in your walk with Jesus.

Father, we are grateful for what you've done over the last six and a half years at Woodland Hills. We are grateful for Twolgnite Sunday and the lives that have been changed as a result of the marriage teaching from all the different speakers we've had in over the years. I ask that you give us wisdom as a church to what's next. Give our elders and staff and leadership thoughts and ideas, a new sacred echo to say yeah, that's it. We're okay. We're very comfortable, Lord, just waiting in you and being at peace for next steps.

I pray there is great unity in our church around this decision. I pray you join us together in this that as we continue to fight for marriage... you have not taken that passion away from me one bit. I pray that I will continue to lead out in this in the local church. I'm still asking that you will allow me to drive this from the local church. Thank you for allowing Woodland Hills to be a church that has been used over the last few years in this area. We look forward to seeing how you are going to use us in the years to come. We are open and ready. We stand here waiting, which often times is the most difficult thing to do as American Christians. But, we are at peace with it and we trust you completely.

Thank you for every husband and wife that's in here. I ask that you would encourage them. For every person in here, I pray that they would be a voice and an advocate for marriage with the duets all around them. For the one who is hurting right now in a marriage, I pray that they would seek out help through Marriage 911, through our Counseling Center. For the single in here that is hopeful and desiring to be married soon, I pray that the lessons they have learned will continue to go with them and launch them well into marriage. For the one that's coming out of a marriage, recently divorced who may be dealing with guilt and regret, I just pray right now that Jesus breathes life into them, breathes life into their heart and soul, and gives them renewed energy, that they would know what their next step is in life. Often times when they come out, especially if it's been a long marriage... I pray that you give them wisdom and peace through this time.

We are grateful for this church. Continue to use Woodland Hills. It's in the name of Jesus that we pray and everyone agreed and said... Amen.