

The Second Mountain Book Discussion for Thursday, January 26th at 6:30 pm

Everyone is welcome, whether you've read the book or not. **For those who are reading the book, please try to read through Chapter 8 (Part I) by Thursday.**

Be prepared for the next two meetings:

- February 9th: Parts II and III, Chapters 9-18
- February 23rd: Parts IV and V, Chapters 19-25

This video clip of David Brooks provides an overview of the author's goals in writing the book:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sltVf06nwiA>

Summary:

The book's Introduction explains: "If the first mountain is about building up the ego and defining the self, the second mountain is about shedding the ego and losing the self". This is not just about each one of us alone, but within the larger context of culture. The author writes, "We live in a culture of hyper-individualism," that has swung too far toward "the self" and which needs to "rebalance". Rebalancing can help people lead a "deeper and more joyful life". This will involve a retreat from the "ambitious, strategic and independent" to an embrace of the "relational, intimate and relentless". The Introduction closes by having the reader take joy seriously - describing its different levels (moral joy, spiritual joy) and, crucially, by distinguishing between happiness - a victory for the self - and joy - the forgetting of oneself: "Happiness is the proper goal for people on their first mountain ... But we only get one life, so we might as well use it hunting for big game: to enjoy happiness, but to surpass happiness toward joy".

Part I ("The Two Mountains") starts with the concept of a "moral ecology" or the culture given to us as we navigate life. The moral ecology of the 1950s, which respected authority and duty, gave way to a culture of "do your own thing," individualism and autonomy, with the dream of "total freedom", placing achievement and self-realization over sacrifice and relationships.

The author then describes that many eventually felt lost in the culture of total freedom because few had actually asked themselves: "What is this freedom for?" He describes the "the instagram life" as one that is on constant display, with an emphasis on being busy. Without stopping to ask, "Why am I doing this?" we are lead to a crisis of meaning, loneliness and distrust.

Questions to think about and possibly discuss:

1. What are your initial thoughts of the book? Are you looking forward to finishing it? Why or why not?

2. Is a “first mountain” (as the author describes it) necessary? Do you know anyone who went straight to the second mountain? Did you? How is life different for them?

3. What is happiness for you? What is your path to get there?

What is joy?

How are happiness and joy different?

4. The first mountain (as described in the book) is all about finding happiness through personal achievement and places life’s primary focus on ourselves. How has American culture influenced this ideology?

5. How might this theology be impacted by gender? Faith? Family? Education?

6. Read Matthew 10:39 (NLT). What type of life Jesus is hoping we find? How is this similar or different to the type of life that is described on the first or second mountain?

What indicators would tell us we are focused on ourselves, and what indicators would tell us we are focused on others? Is it either or?

Key Ideas in Part I:

1. Individualism undermines our social connections. The first part of the book talks a lot about individualism. How do you feel about individualism and how it affects our society?

2. A lack of social connections leads to widespread societal problems. People who take an individualistic approach tend to be lonelier and distrust others.

Do you agree that having a lack of social connections can lead to widespread societal problems? In what ways do you see some of those societal problems?

3. The freedom of individualism makes many people feel adrift, leading them to focus on the pursuit of material success. "People are climbing the first mountain: the mountain of worldly success. Climbing the first mountain gives people a sense of purpose and direction, but it's an unreliable path to fulfillment that ultimately comes at a great cost."

Do you agree that individualism leads people to pursue material success. Why or why not?

4. The pursuit of material success eventually hits a dead end. This is when you hit the peak of your first mountain and end up in the valley between the first and second mountains.

What are some things that cause a person to hit the peak or end of their first mountain? How does one navigate through the valley between the first and second mountains to begin climbing the second?

How does God's Church fit into all of this?

How does Wayzata Community Church fit into all of this?