

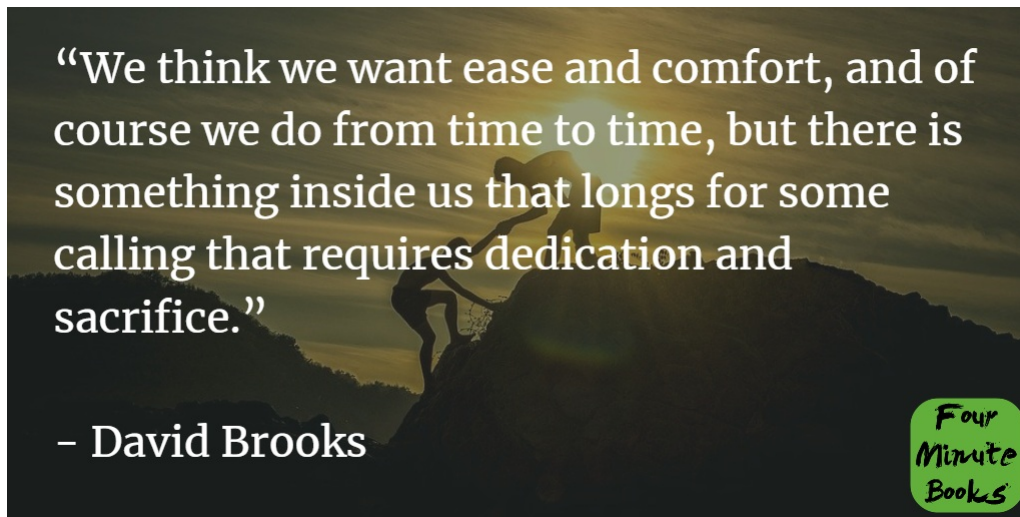
The Second Mountain Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Second Mountain* argues that the key to living a meaningful, fulfilling, and happy life is not found in the pursuit of self-improvement but instead a life of service to others.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



In the 2016 movie *Doctor Strange*, the main character is a surgeon. Having his hands mangled by a terrible car accident, he is unable to perform surgery again. That is, until he discovers sorcery. Partway through his journey to learn the strange new art of magic, his mentor gives him this wise advice:

| “It’s not about you.”

At this point in the movie, Strange has a choice to make. He can either use his newfound abilities to help save the world or squander them on keeping his hands healed so he can continue to do surgery. Strange cannot do both. Fortunately for half of humanity, he decides to choose the higher path and become a superhero.

Fictional characters aside, you and I have the same choice to make. Will we choose to use our innate talents and skills to ascend our own mountain of success? Or might we instead give our lives in service to others, climbing a different, better mountain instead? Offering yourself for a better cause is exactly the idea that David Brooks teaches in his book *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*. After reading this, you may rethink your goal of rising to the top of the ladder of material wealth.

Here are 3 of the most life-changing lessons this book teaches:

1. Individualism causes a lack of social connections, which leads to people feeling adrift as they focus on the first mountain, which is material success.
2. Joy is better than happiness, and we receive it when we scale the second mountain, or a life of caring for people.
3. Putting the needs of others above your own requires commitment and hard work, love alone won't cut it.

Get your climbing gear on and let's learn how to scale *The Second Mountain*!

Lesson 1: Society is plagued by widespread selfishness, which is making us all lonely and ultimately unhappy.

Individualism is rampant in our world. Everywhere we turn, we see people telling us to do whatever we want, follow our desires, and focus on ourselves. We are taught to resist any commitment that could limit our personal freedom, such as being religious or starting a family. Unfortunately, this way of thinking sets us apart from others, which negates the benefits that communities provide.

Whether you like it or not, the loneliness that results from doing things your way and living free is harmful to society. Less than 1/4 of Americans trust their government, and the number of people who know their neighbors is decreasing also. We are becoming increasingly lonely, and we see higher rates of depression and suicide as a result. People don't have a feeling of grounding anymore because they are climbing the first mountain of material success.

While you may experience some prosperity after scaling this peak, you will still end up feeling that you are missing something from your life. The problem is that the pursuit of personal enjoyment is fleeting because it only comes when we've completed a goal. Life then becomes a sea of sadness, with little bits of pleasure scattered in between. So what are we to do about this dilemma we are all experiencing?

Lesson 2: Serving the people around us is the greatest focus we can have in life, and brings not only happiness, but joy as well.

Now, before you start groaning at how difficult it can be to lose yourself in the care of others, it's not all so terrible. It is wise to begin your ascent up the second mountain by asking yourself, "what's in it for me?"

First, you don't have to give up your goals entirely to help other people. It's not about avoiding happiness as much as not making it your sole focus. Additionally, flawed as happiness is, it's nothing compared to joy, which is a more constant and profound sense of emotional well-being.

Instead of a quest for self-fulfillment, the path to joy is about self-transcendence. When you give your time and energy to others, enjoy their company, and help them rise higher, you improve their lives. **You will experience joy as you are uplifted by seeing those you aid ascend with your help.** This is how it feels to scale the second mountain, but also know that there is work ahead.

Lesson 3: Loving those you seek to help isn't enough to keep you going when it gets hard to continue; you must be committed to working hard.

While it may sound easy to make this journey about being friendly and loving toward everyone, you need to be aware of some harsh realities of the second mountain. When you let others into your life to help them, you expose yourself to their trauma. In a world of addiction, loneliness, depression, and many other ailments, that can feel like a steep hill to top. Unfortunately, the Beatles were wrong when they sang "All You Need Is Love."

A vital piece of climbing gear for your journey up the second mountain is commitment. You must have dedication to your cause, but how can you express that? **Decide on some personal agreements, protocols, or rituals you will execute when it gets tough to endure on the path.** As you make these patterns habits, you can weather the storms ahead by having a predetermined response to difficulties.

For example, a married couple may establish the habit of going on a date each week. It may be hard at first to protect this ritual from outside influences. With consistency, however, the activity builds a space to allow the couple to keep their love constant, even through tough times.

The Second Mountain Review

What a powerful message, this way of thinking blows my mind. I've been pondering that quote from *Doctor Strange* for a couple of weeks now, and *The Second Mountain* really hit home the idea that my life isn't about just my own enjoyment. I highly recommend this one to everyone, no matter where you are in life.

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Who would I recommend The Second Mountain summary to?

The 45-year-old accountant who feels unfulfilled with their career, the 31-year-old married couple that feels disconnected from their community, and anyone who is missing joy in their life and is unsure where to find it.