Bob: Long before there were any hit songs or Grammy Awards, Steven Curtis Chapman and his wife Mary Beth were a young married couple living in Nashville, Tennessee, hoping that they could somehow break into the music business—without a whole lot of money and without any idea of one of the unexpected trials that was just around the corner for them.

Mary Beth: There was a baby bottle sterilizer on the stove. We were in a townhouse-type of an apartment, and we were looking for homes. A realtor was coming to the house. We just picked everything up and left. I totally forgot the stove was on. About an hour-and-a-half / two hours later, we came home; and our apartment had burned.

Steven: And the real nail in the coffin, so to speak, was—we got a letter one day. It was the insurance company of the landlord saying, "We’re suing you for the damages to the apartment."

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, June 17th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We'll learn today how the fire at the Chapman townhome might have meant the end of a marriage and a family. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Tuesday edition.

Dennis: Bob, you know, we’ve had a lot of fun on the Love Like You Mean It® cruise, but one of my favorite memories—maybe, kind of a top-ten experience of my life—was having dinner in the back of the ship with my daughter, Ashley, and her husband Michael, and Steven Curtis Chapman, and his wife Mary Beth, as the sun was going down. Here’s why—because it was my birthday.

Bob: So, you got a little special perk on the cruise. [Laughter]

Dennis: I don't usually get special perks, but the staff had compassion on me—
Bob: Had mercy on you! [Laughter]

Dennis: —on this deal. They set up a dinner, and we sat on the back of the ship. I think—now, don’t hold me to this, Bob—but I think this is an area of the ship—for other cruises—that’s a nudist area. [Laughter]

Bob: But you were all fully-clothed and in your right mind?

Dennis: Oh, yes! Oh, oh, yes! [Laughter]

Bob: Alright, just making sure.

Dennis: Oh, yes! [Laughter] No, that would not be a top-ten memory!

Bob: Well, we have known Steven and Mary Beth for more than two decades; in fact, I go back to the middle ‘80s, right after Steven had first recorded his first album. I was working in San Antonio at a radio station. We brought him to town for a concert, and I sang background with him in that concert. [Laughter] That’s one of my highlights—you know—top-ten memories.

Dennis: There you go.

Bob: You’ve got the back of the boat—I’ve got singing My Turn Now with Steven Curtis Chapman as part of the back-up band that night.

Dennis: And we’ve had him here, with our staff, at our staff conference to sing and speak; and now, we’re going to bring him on the Love Like You Mean It cruise. It’s going to be a blast—a lot of fun—a lot of spiritual equipping. Frankly, it could be a life-changing Valentine’s week with your spouse.

Bob: He and Mary Beth are going to be joining us, along with Tenth Avenue North and Guy Penrod. Of course, Dennis and Barbara are going to be there. I’m going to be there. Voddie Baucham is going to be joining us this year. Dave and Ann Wilson are going to be with us. It’s going to be a great week as we set sail from Miami next February.

We thought we should alert our listeners to the fact that we expect, this month, we’ll sell it out. So, we wanted to come on FamilyLife Today and just say, “If you’ve thought
about going—if next year is a good year for you to go—now’s the time to sign up because—

**Dennis:** Maybe an anniversary, maybe a spouse’s birthday / a surprise. There are a lot of couples who are celebrating anywhere from 10, 15, 20, 25, or more years on the *Love Like You Mean It* cruise.

**Bob:** Yes. We sat down with Steven Curtis and Mary Beth Chapman, not long ago, to talk about their marriage. I think it surprises a lot of folks when they hear about couples—like you and Barbara, or Mary Ann and me, or Steven Curtis and Mary Beth Chapman—and they learn that it has not always been smooth sailing for those couples throughout their marriage.

**Dennis:** Smooth sailing?

**Bob:** Well, I thought I would throw that in. [Laughter] We had a conversation with Steven and Mary Beth about the early years of their marriage.

[Recorded Interview]

**Dennis:** There was a moment in your marriage where you were boiling some water on the stove—

**Mary Beth:** That is correct.

**Dennis:** —and you mistakenly forgot about the water on the stove that was boiling. What happened?

**Mary Beth:** It was a baby bottle sterilizer in the water—

**Steven:** You can tell it was our first child—

**Mary Beth:** You can tell it was our first child because, now, you just pick the passy up, brush it off, stick it back in their mouth, and keep going—[Laughter]—five-second rule!

**Dennis:** First child!

**Mary Beth:** The first child—everything is sterilized.

**Steven:** Sterilizing everything—you know—wearing latex gloves.
Mary Beth: Oh, my goodness! But there was a baby bottle sterilizer on the stove. We were in a townhouse-type of an apartment, and we were looking for homes. A realtor was coming to the house to take us to look at some homes. She came to the front door. Nobody ever came to the front door because there wasn't even a sidewalk to the front door, but she didn't know us—she came to the front door. We just picked everything up and left. I totally forgot the stove was on. About an hour-and-a-half / two hours later, we came home; and our apartment had burned.

Bob: You drove up—there were fire trucks.

Mary Beth: Correct.

Bob: You all thought, "Gee!"

Mary Beth: Steve said: "Boy, there's something going on in the neighborhood. There are fire trucks here." That just kind of trailed off, and his next words out of his mouth were: "Wait a minute! That's our apartment."

Steven: And at first, we didn't even know what the cause was. It wasn't immediate—saying: "Oh, boy! We left that stove on." It was just, "How in the world could this have happened?" Slowly, it dawned on her—they said something: "...looked like it started in the kitchen." It didn't burn to the ground, but it was smoke and water damage—to the point that pretty much everything was lost, and—

Dennis: Insurance?

Steven: No, not a bit! The real nail in the coffin, so to speak, was—just as we were kind of starting to get things back in order, we got a letter, one day, from an insurance company. I remember kind of laughing—it was some Firemen-something. We thought, you know: "They must be coming after us—going, ‘You guys need us,’ —you know—‘With your history, you need our insurance.’" [Laughter] I kind of laughed and said, "They must have heard about us."

Well, we opened it. It was the insurance company of the landlord, saying, “We're suing you for the damages to the apartment.” So, not only did we have nothing to get our lives kind of started—now, they were hitting us with that. So, we were in shock.

Dennis: How much money were they asking you for?
Steven: At that point, they were asking for $13,000, which—

Mary Beth: $13 or $14,000.

Dennis: And I heard you say that it might as well have been $13 million.

Steven: Yes, exactly. At that point, it was like, “Where in the world?!” You know, we had a little Honda Civic—that was pretty much all we had to our name—but we just didn't even know. We thought that, "Lord, this is totally a God-sized problem," because we had no way to cover this / take care of this. God really did—I mean, that was one of so many—and we've all had those in our journey—but where God just totally moved in and provided in a way that we couldn't have ever imagined.

Bob: Mary Beth, your parents came down to help you guys—

Steven: That's correct.

Bob: —with the apartment—help get re-established there.

Mary Beth: Emily was six weeks old. I had had a C-section. So, I was kind of on the mend; and I was very young. We got married at 19 and 21 and got pregnant six months after we were married.

I was still—what? —21, I guess, at the time—and still very much a daddy’s girl. I called—just in hysterics: "Mom and Dad, we had this fire." It’s about a six-and-a-half hour drive. Five-and-a-half hours later, my mom and dad are in the driveway—with paint buckets and ladders—like he's going to fix it / he's going to repair it. He's going to fix it for me. He will make it better.

Dennis: Got the picture.

Mary Beth: Got the picture. Yes, they came down to save me.

Bob: Daddy to the rescue.

Mary Beth: Daddy to the rescue.

Bob: Mary Beth, before the fire, were you aware of maybe a mixed loyalty in your own heart?
Mary Beth: Not as much. The fire really revealed that in my own heart. I am the youngest of three children. My brother is nine years older than me / my sister is seven years older than me, and I was the surprise. I've always been a daddy's girl. I don't think I would have been able to articulate it when we first got married. It was obviously there; but it was the fire that really took us to the point of, you know, my dad was there. I mean, he was coming to fix it, and I was going to let him.

Bob: Steven, having your father-in-law show up—with buckets and ladders and offering to help—nothing wrong with that. How did it get ugly?

Steven: Right, yes. Well, and it wasn’t—I mean, I was grateful to have them there. I was thankful. I think, you know, internally, I was probably feeling a bit like, "Boy, this is really going to challenge…" because I’d already felt some of this, you know, with just getting married—and then coming and helping. Every time we’d go home, I’d kind of feel like, “Where is my spot in here and how do I fit into this?” but it really came to a head because what happened is—her family came immediately.

My relationship with my family and my parents was really a lot of—by this time, especially—“No news is good news,” you know. We didn't talk a lot—we didn't stay intimately involved, but we were very close. I knew I could call on them and say, "Hey, you need to come help." But at this point, I'm looking at the situation, going, "My mom and dad aren't going to do anything but be in the way and can't really help us that much, anyway, right now." Mary Beth's dad was retired. My dad was still working. It just—I thought, "We don't really need you"; and they said, "Hey, we'll come help if we need to."

So, in the meantime, I think her mom and dad were feeling a little bit like: “Man! We're carrying this weight all ourselves,” and, “Why didn't Steve have his mom and dad come?” But, again, not being the kind of family to talk about it, I didn't realize any of this was happening. They were—

Bob: So they were a little resentful that they're there helping and working—your parents seem like you're just blowing the whole deal off.

Steven: Yes.

Bob: “Why doesn't Steve call his mom and dad down here to help out?"

Steven: Yes, and Mary Beth gets caught in the middle of that a little bit because they started talking to her about it. She's kind of, “Well, maybe, not,”—I think sort of helping defend them a little bit—but also feeling, “Well, I guess maybe they should.”
Emotions are exposed. Everything is so blown out of proportion because you've just lost pretty much everything, and you've got a five-week-old baby. You don't even know how you're going to take care of her; and now, we have no house and no place to call home. We're living with friends.

**Dennis:** And your job situation—

**Steven:** Yes, at that point, I had not even started recording yet.

**Dennis:** —you were a hungry artist, literally.

**Steven:** Yes.

**Mary Beth:** I had just stopped working when I gave birth to Emily—I just stopped.

**Bob:** Quit your job. You were hoping to live off of songwriting royalties?

**Mary Beth:** Correct.

**Steven:** Yes; but what ended up happening—in that experience / in that situation—was probably erred to the wrong extreme of wanting to say, "Look, I'm not going to start looking for a demon, behind every tree and under every rock, and giving the devil credit for things he didn't even think of." But there is no question in my mind that, at this time in our lives and our marriage, there was absolutely—the enemy saw an opening and said: "You know what? There's already some dissention / there's already some conflict here. They are at a tender place."

I don't know how much—again, I don't want to give more credit to what Satan knows is down the line—but if he had any idea and knows: "This is a family that's going to make some impact in God's kingdom in the days to come. I've got to take them out. I've got to wipe this out."

All of these thoughts and emotions came to a head—there was this monumental explosion. My mom came to visit with my grandmother—just to kind of check on us. One Sunday afternoon, they came from church—drove up from Paducah—a couple of hours away—had her dress on / dressed up / makeup. Mary Beth's mom and dad are up to their knees in soot, and laundry, and trying to help us.
Long story short—it kind of ended up / after totally being blindsided—I knew none of this was coming or was going on, which kind of shows how clueless I was, at that point. It ended up with Mary Beth, and her mom, and dad on one side of the room, kind of holding on to her saying, "Well, we just may need to take our little girl back to Ohio," and my mom saying, "Well, I'm going to take my son back to Paducah." You know—"This was just—maybe, this just isn't going to work out."

And I remember, in that moment—just out of complete desperation—knowing that the only place I know to go right now is to ask the Lord to come down into the middle of this situation. I remember, at the top of my lungs—and my voice was pretty raspy the next few days after that one, too—but this time, I was screaming at the enemy of relationships—just saying: "You're not going to have this family. You will not have this home and this family—what God has brought together. There's a lot of emotion, and a lot of misunderstanding. There's a lot frustration right now."

**Dennis:** Did you scream that?

**Steven:** I did. I screamed this—

**Dennis:** —in front of your—

**Mary Beth:** Everybody.

**Steven:** —in front of my sweet wife's parents, who were looking at me like: "Where in the world is this man coming from? He is now talking to Satan, at the top of his lungs. All we're doing is trying to help get this apartment cleaned up."

But I think they understood and knew that there was something way more spiritual and more significant going on than just a misunderstanding of parents and of us. It was a scary time, but—

**Bob:** What were you thinking while your husband was rebuking the enemy?

**Mary Beth:** I remember, standing there, and watching my husband—very vocal husband—and going, "Okay, I need to stand with him, and I need to support this,"—but also feeling like a little girl who was not protected / not taken care of—you know—I didn't have a place to live, and this newborn infant that I didn't even know how to take care of yet, and just all these emotions.
I just wanted it to all to go away; but, at the same time, a real strong sense of needing to stand with him. As difficult as it was—in that time, for all of us—myself included on my side of the Chapman clan—God did show up because, as difficult as communicators as my family was, they opened up. It's been a process—and really started standing with us and understanding. He really—in particular, my dad, really started responding to what you were needing from him.

**Steven:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I was listening to this story unfold. First of all, I just want to thank you both for your willingness to be honest about this and share the story. Yesterday, I was on the phone with a former professional football player—played in the NFL—he was a defensive back. I said, "What's the most important thing that I need to know when it comes to playing defense?" And he said, "Well, there are really two things." He said: "Number one, you need to know your opponent; and, number two, you need to think offensively. You need to know what your opponent is most likely thinking about doing, on offense, when he's got the ball."

I thought about that as you were sharing this story. Even at 21 years of age, you may have not had the full game plan in terms of understanding the enemy of God. There is a devil. He does exist—yes—and he does have a game plan. He is trying to divide couples, but you understood that. You had that firmly in place. You stepped forward in there—in the midst of him trying to divide you, as a couple—and you provided leadership.

Genesis, Chapter 2, verse 24, says, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one, one flesh." The picture there is—and you've used the words perfectly, Steven—both of you—Mary Beth—you severed loyalty back to your parents. You re-established a new loyalty through the cleaving—the commitment to love one another, where you say: "You know what? We may not do this perfectly; but I'm yours, and you're mine. We're going to work through this together. We're not going to run home to Mommy and Daddy."

**Bob:** The other thing that I think that is significant here is—you recognized that that plan that God has for leaving and cleaving was under attack—not from your in-laws, not from your wife, not from your parents—but it was under attack from the one who most wanted the marriage to fail—and that's the enemy of your soul. That's where you turned your attention. So many times, Dennis, the enemy gets us to look elsewhere and think: “You're the problem,” “The in-laws are the problem,” “My wife's the problem,” “The fire is the problem,”—when he's [Satan's] the problem.
Dennis: Ephesians, Chapter 6 says, "Your struggle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities." There is a spiritual force of evil that wants to divide Christians in marriage. He wants to get you to set up war against one another. It's one of the principles we teach in our conferences and our I Still Do events, all around the United States, where we talk about: “Your mate is not your enemy.”

Bob: Yes.

Dennis: We have couples write that down on a 3x5 card and put it on the refrigerator to remind them, "My mate is not my enemy." I've had couples write me, after our conferences and say, "We walked around, the entire next week, reminding ourselves, 'My mate is not my enemy.'"

Steven: Right.

Dennis: And what Steven did—Steven spotted who the enemy was—

Bob: That's right.

Dennis: —in the midst of the battle. It helped point out to both Mary Beth’s parents and his own parents: "We are committed to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus Christ is going to be the builder of our home." Really, I'm excited that they made that commitment, back then, because I don't think we'd be sitting here today.

As you were sharing, I was thinking of another conversation Bob and I had with another couple—Bill and Vonette Bright. There was a point, early in their ministry / in their marriage, where Bill and Vonette almost went different directions. But it took Bill stepping in, and it took Vonette humbling her heart, and Bill admitting he was wrong, to be able to bring healing to that marriage.

I think what you're modeling here, Steven, is courageous spiritual leadership, even when you may feel like you don't know what you're doing. [Laughter]

Steven: That's the case, yes. Clueless!

Dennis: You pray a prayer—you say, "Lord God, help me."

Bob: See, I thought that would be the follow-up to Speechless—would be Clueless.
**Steven:** Well, it really was. [Laughter] It pretty much was, but I tried to figure out a little more creative way to say it.

**[Studio]**

**Bob:** [Laughter] Well, we’ve been listening back to a conversation we had—

**Dennis:** You insulted him!—[Laughter] —from “Speechless to Clueless.” Who hasn’t felt clueless; right?

**Bob:** That’s right.

Steven Curtis and Mary Beth Chapman are going to be joining us in February on the *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise. We just hope our listeners can come with us this year. There are a limited number of cabins still available. We expect it’s going to sell out this month. So, if you are interested, now is the time to go to FamilyLifeToday.com and find out more about the *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise.

**Dennis:** I promise you—at some point during the cruise—I will twist Steven’s arm and get him to sing my favorite of the songs that he has written and sings.

**Bob:** I know which one it is.

**Dennis:** You do. Shall we hear it here just quickly before we tell folk’s how they can sign up?

**Bob:** Here it is.

[Steven singing *The Great Adventure*]

**Bob:** Okay, some of our listeners are listening and going, “I don’t remember that!”

**Dennis:** “I’ve never heard that!”

**Bob:** That goes way back.

**Dennis:** It goes way back. It is a bit of mixing the metaphors between saddling up your horses and coming on a cruise. So, don’t bring your horse on the cruise; but bring your spouse. [Laughter]
Bob: And marriage is a great adventure.

Dennis: It is a great adventure. I just love that song because it really is a great adventure if Jesus Christ is your Lord and Master.

Bob: Again, if our listeners would like to join us—with Steven and Mary Beth Chapman, and Tenth Avenue North, and Voddie Baucham, and Kirk and Chelsea Cameron, and we haven’t mentioned that Stephen and Alex Kendrick are going to be joining us / it looks like we’re going to get a chance to see a sneak preview of their movie on the cruise as well—it’s going to be a great cruise and we’re almost sold out.

I went to our team and I said, “Can we do anything special for our FamilyLife Today listeners?” And they said, “You know, we’re going to sell out pretty quickly anyway.” I said, “I know, but they’re our listeners.”

So, they put a little special offer together—you go to FamilyLifeToday.com, and you click the link at the top of the page that says, “GO DEEPER,” you’ll find out about the special offer for the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise. It does look like we’ll be all booked up by the end of the month. I hope you will plan to join us. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link at the top of the page that says, “GO DEEPER,” or just call 1-800-FL-TODAY to get more information about the cruise. We’ll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to hear an interview that we recorded with Chris August, a Christian music artist who’s going to be joining us at I Still Do™ in Chicago, and Portland, and Washington, DC, later on this summer. He was with us on the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise back in February. We’ll visit with Chris and hear him sing a couple of songs, including a song he’s going to be doing at I Still Do coming up in August. That all comes up tomorrow, and I hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

©Song: The Great Adventure
Artist: Steven Curtis Chapman
Album: The Great Adventure (p) 1992 Sparrow
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