Bob: Ted and Amy Cunningham used to get into conflict about where he should park at the mall until they decided just to let it go.

Ted: I told her—I said: “Amy, listen, there’s just not a lot of adventure left for men in the world anymore. Let me find my own parking space. I just want to find my own parking space.” I said, “When we pull into the mall—I don’t know why God designed it this way—but when you even look at a spot, it automatically disqualifies that spot. I can’t park there. I’m not allowed to park there. I have to go find my own spot.”

Now, what she does—and I love this—I pull 20 spaces down. She leans over, and she starts massaging my bicep. See, we are enjoying this—she’ll look at me and say, “You did this all by yourself!”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, October 3rd. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. You know some of those little things that bug you in your marriage? Well, as it turns out, those could be a source of a lot of fun. We’ll talk about how to make that happen today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on this Tuesday edition. Has anybody ever described you—that you know of—as being a fun-loving person? Does that—

Dennis: Oh, yes.

Bob: —phrase come up?

Dennis: In fact, I’ve got a lot in common with our guest on the broadcast today—

Bob: Really?

Dennis: —because I’ve told Barbara recently—I said, “You know, one of my favorite things to do in your life is to bring a smile to your face.”

And our guest on the broadcast has written a book called Fun Loving You. Ted Cunningham joins us today. Welcome back!
Don’t you enjoy making Amy smile and laugh?

**Ted:** It’s the number one priority before I leave the house every day.

**Dennis:** Give them the story about how you try on clothes. [Laughter] I mean, I tried—I tried to picture this!

**Ted:** You could do this, Dennis.

**Dennis:** I’ve done it. No! No! I just didn’t quite have the same posture as you had, but go ahead and share it with us.

**Ted:** Well, you have to—

**Dennis:** I think—I think this is allowed on Christian radio.

**Ted:** So, I’ll come out and I model for her—and in New York runway fashion kind of way—throw my head back—and then, you have to get creative / you have to find new moves. It’s worked—I’ve been able to do it—she doesn’t laugh every time / there are some times she laughs. The problem is—I have a nine-year-old son who is now doing this / doesn’t fully understand—

**Bob:** —the implications!

**Ted:** —doesn’t know what I’m doing. Smile/laugh—and it’s an *image* she carries the rest of the day.

**Dennis:** Oh, my goodness!

**Ted:** That’s scary!

**Dennis:** That thought—that’s scary!

**Ted:** She keeps it the rest of the day.

**Dennis:** Well, Ted is a pastor. I think you’d *love* to go to his church in Branson, Missouri—it is Woodland Hills Family Church. It’s probably the *only* church that has a rollercoaster on its property.

**Bob:** Maybe the only church in America!

**Ted:** No, there is one other church, and we formed a network. And there’s—it’s a theme-park church network. [Laughter]
Bob: New denomination. [Laughter]

Dennis: If you get to Branson, you've got to stop in at Woodland Hills Family Church. I want you to share with our listeners your FLY principle. That's just a good way to start the broadcast—FLY.

Ted: Fun-Loving-You. We have a “Fun Loving You” list that we keep on each other, and it is a couple pages long. We got this, years ago, from Gary Smalley’s honor list.

So, Amy and I—because we enjoy life together—so, this is Ecclesiastes 9:7-9. I love the Book of Ecclesiastes: Chapter 1—life is hard; Chapter 12—then, you die. I mean, these are the bookends of Ecclesiastes. A lot of people avoid it, thinking, "Dark/pessimistic book"; but what Solomon is doing, throughout that whole book, is painting a picture of the grind.

Life is a grind—it’s difficult / it’s challenging. Psalm 90, verse 10, says, “You have 70 years in this grind / 80 if you are strong,” —and—“Those years are filled with”—what?—“sorrow and anguish”—difficulty/pain. The word, toilsome, is used—I mean, it is gruesome. The grind can be so difficult—doesn’t matter how much money you make / you can’t buy your way out of it. Doesn’t matter how many degrees you get / you can’t outsmart it. We’re in the grind—all the way until the end.

But I love the nugget in the middle of Ecclesiastes that I just don’t hear a lot of pastors preaching on it or teachers teaching on it—it’s Ecclesiastes 9:7-9—it says this: “Eat your food with gladness. Drink your wine with a joyful heart for now God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white. Anoint your head with oil." It’s speaking of joy, and festivity, and enjoying life. And I love verse 9—it says I don’t have to trade all of that joy, and festivity, and enjoying life when I get married. I don’t have to trade it in. I can do both; because Ecclesiastes 9:9 says, “Enjoy life with your wife whom you love all your meaningless days that God has given you under the sun.”

When I go to churches that don’t have open Bibles, I always misquote that verse on purpose. I’ll say—after I read verses 7 and 8, I’ll go: “Now, look at verse 9. [Speaking with a heavy tone]: ‘Endure life with your wife all your miserable days.’” And I’ll get, “Hmm, that’s good. That’s good." I'll get amen’ed. [Laughter] And I’ll have to say: “That’s not what it says! But that’s what we think it should say.” We make the decision to enjoy life together in the midst of the grind.

So, we’ve compiled a list—I have one—all of the reasons why it’s fun loving Amy Cunningham. She has a list of all the reasons why it is fun loving Ted Cunningham—because again, these are decisions we make in the grind. I can’t get out of the grind, but the blessing is I get to make decisions every day in it.

Dennis: So, give us a couple of your—that are on your FLY list.
Ted: Okay; so, first seven/eight years of marriage frustrated me—not anymore. I told her—I said: “Amy, listen, just not a lot of adventure left for men in the world anymore. Let me find my own parking space. I just want to find my own parking space.” I said: “When we pull into the mall—I don’t know why God designed it this way—but when you even look at a spot, it automatically disqualifies that spot. I can’t park there. I’m not allowed to park there. I have to go find my own spot.”

And she used to—years when we were plugged into one another as a source of life—she would look at me and be like: “You stubborn, stubborn man! Why can’t you just go with this good spot that I showed you?” I’d pull 20 spaces down—“No, I’m pulling into…” Now, what she does—and I love this—I pull 20 spaces down. She leans over, and she starts massaging my bicep—see, we are enjoying this. She’ll look at me; and she’ll say, “You did this all by yourself!” [Laughter] And I’ll say, “I sure did.”

And what I caught her doing last year—she knows those Andes candies mints—I mean, I can eat boxes of those at a time—they are not good for me.

Bob: The chocolate with the green in the middle—

Ted: The chocolate with the green in the middle. They are so fantastic. And I caught her in the parking lot—she had a bag of them in her purse. She keeps them there, now, for when I do something good; okay? [Laughter] She pulled one out, and she handed it to me. While I’m unwrapping it, I realize: “My wife just gave me a treat!”—right? “She is rewarding my good behavior.”

Bob: You do this with kids and dogs; don’t you? [Laughter]

Ted: Yes. But we just—we laugh about that—things that a lot of couples get stuck with.

She thinks I’m an expert on everything. I love when we are driving down the road. It used to frustrate me when she would say, “What are they doing here?” at a construction site. And I’d be like: “I have no idea! I’m not involved in any of this decision-making with this construction.” But now, I totally make it up; and I just go with it. I’m like: “I told the boys: ‘Rip it up. We’re going to put down new pipes,’”—and we just go with it instead of allowing things to eat away at us and frustrate us. We’ve decided everything—potentially frustrating in our marriage—we are going to find a way to enjoy it.

Bob: You know, for years, as we’ve talked with couples about marriage—and we talk about this in our Art of Marriage® video series—the differences between us, as men and women / as husbands and wives—our personality differences / our gender differences—all of that can be a source of irritation and frustration; or we can just recognize: “Different doesn’t mean bad. It means different.” You’ve gone from just accepting differences to celebrating and having fun with differences—

Ted: A blast—we have a blast with them.
Bob: —and it’s our perspective on those differences that can be transformative; isn’t it?

Ted: Oh, and I mean, she, all the time—I’ll come in the bathroom, after she’s used the curling iron. I mean, for years, anytime—if I got within five feet of the curling iron, she would be like, “YOU GOT TO GET BACK!” I’d be like, “Honey, when was the last time I picked up your curling iron?” —I said. But now, when I go into the bathroom, I act like I’m going to pick up her—

Bob: You pretend.

Ted: Yes. I’m going to—and so, again, we just take everything—we couldn’t even watch movies together because, for me, watching a movie means you sit down and you watch the movie. For her, it means you read a magazine, surf Pinterest, and you do four other things—which puts all the pressure of watching the movie on me. [Laughter] If it says on the bottom of the screen, “Six years later,” I’ve got to keep her up to date with everything going on in the movie. Something will happen; and she’ll go, “Ahh, what just happened?!” I’ll be like, “AHHH!” —I mean, so frustrated. I’d be like: “Okay, here is what happened. A big piece of metal broke off the space shuttle. It hit the space station. They’re now stuck.” And she’s like, “Well, what are they going to do?” I’m like: “I have no idea! I’m not an astronaut; but I bet if we watch the rest of the movie, we will learn how to fix the space shuttle the next time we need that information.”

So, whatever it is—in the car, at home, parenting styles—I mean, all of it. I mean, we have stories with all of it—but we just take—and when we find a new frustration—because I love doing this with couples in counseling: “Hey, write down five things that are fun, just the two of you together—you just really enjoy.” When a couple is stuck in the grind—

Bob: “I can’t think of anything.”

Ted: —they can’t think of one.

Bob: Right.

Ted: “Write down one—now, just one thing that you just, every time you think about it / when it comes to him, you laugh or puts a smile on your face.” Well, when a couple is stuck, they can’t think of any.

So, I’ve found it easier to start with “Write down something that is just frustrating and has been your entire marriage with your husband or with your wife.” Then, they can start the list. I have more fun pastoral counseling with this—where you just start at number one on the list. You help them make decisions how to enjoy that frustration and that irritation.
Dennis: And kind of relearn it—

Ted: Yes.

Dennis: —again, because the grind will suck the life out of you.

Ted: That’s right.

Dennis: You ran across a couple in Arizona who had a t-shirt called—was it the “Mudders?”

Bob: The “Tough Mudders.”

Dennis: “Tough Mudders”?  

Ted: “Tough Mudders”—yes. We were having dinner, as a family, at a restaurant. I saw this—I’d say this middle-aged couple—and he was wrapping himself up with bandages. They looked worn out and a mess, but they were laughing and having fun. I kind of live by this principle out of the Song of Solomon that “Every marriage is a duet”—right?—singing back and forth—“in need of great backup singers.”

Bob: Right.

Ted: So, the backup singers are the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Solomon. Every time you read them in the Song of Solomon, they are advocates for marriage / not just a spouse. I think that is a big problem we have today, especially with in-laws. We have too many mother-in-laws and father-in-laws that are backing up their child and not the marriage.

So, whenever I see a couple, in love and having fun together in public, it’s a field trip. I take my kids over to them—I just give brief interview of them. I want my kids to hear: “Why are you two enjoying…”

Well, our family watched this couple, having a ball, from across the restaurant. I finally went up to them and said—I couldn’t see the “Tough Mudders” shirt on them at the time. I knew they were kind of matching in what they were wearing, and I just went up to them and said—like I do a lot: “Man, you guys are having a ball together. You guys are laughing together / you are having fun. What in the world is going on? Why are you having so much fun?”

And he said, “We just finished the Tough Mudder.” Now, if a listener doesn’t know what the Tough Mudder is—it’s kind of like a mini-marathon but with all these crazy events. You get shocked with like a little electrocution-thing—you go down through water, and under barbed wire, and over fences. And this couple said: “It was the worst thing we’ve ever done in our married life. We are in pain. We were both concerned we wouldn’t be
able to make the living the next week—I mean, this is how rough this thing is. Now, we are sitting here...”—and they probably went for weeks or months off of that one morning in Gilbert, Arizona, outside of Phoenix, *enjoying* life together and the stories they have with it.

I think the sadness for me today is watching couples just living in that frustration, and that bitterness, and that anger. They don’t understand that they can decide their way out of that.

**Bob:** You said something really interesting. You said they probably went for weeks or months off that one morning. These islands of fun in a relationship kind of go into a storage tank that we can draw out of—

**Ted:** Absolutely.

**Bob:** —for a period of time; don't they?

**Ted:** Whenever I work with a couple—and I did just a few weeks ago, at a family camp—their marriage was hit by cancer, their marriage was hit by the loss of a child, their marriage was hit by the loss of a job, their marriage was hit by what could be the loss of their home. I sat down with them, and my heart was breaking. The more they shared their story—I'm just going: “Oh, where do we start? Where do we start? Where do we start?”

I said: “But here is the problem: Cancer, loss of home, loss of job, loss of child—in the midst of this / as painful as this is—this is what the Scripture clearly points to as the grind. This hits us all. We all have stories of health issues. We all have stories of loss in our family, and pain, and difficulty.” But I said: “You can’t put your marriage in there. You can’t put your marriage—because you are teammates. Right now, your marriage is in the midst of that grind. You placed your marriage in there, and you can’t remove your marriage. The problem is you are both wearing different jerseys—you’re not on the same team right now.”

**Bob:** Right.

**Ted:** And I said: “I want to help you. I want to pastor you through all of this pain right here.” But I said, “I can’t do that until you are teammates.” I think they started to get that because that’s Ecclesiastes 9:7-9, “Enjoy life with your wife in the midst of the grind for this is your lot in life.” You *have* to be a team. You have to make that decision because—guess what?—more is going to be added to this grind.

Amy and I have decided that we’ve got plenty of challenges ahead of us—plenty of hard times, and pain, and loss, and trials ahead of us. The decision we’ve made is: “We are going to be a team no matter what the grind throws us.”
**Dennis:** What you described, a bit earlier, as you were going through the barbed wire, and the mud, and climbing through it together, and getting bruises and scrapes in the process, I was thinking, “That sounds like war.” Truthfully, we are in a spiritual battle.

**Ted:** Yes.

**Dennis:** There is a war taking place that is unseen around us. If you don’t build some islands or oases in your marriage—you know, a place of refuge / a place to be refreshed and be renewed in your relationship—you end up standing up in the foxhole and duking it out with each other—

**Ted:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —and forgetting the fact that your mate isn’t your enemy, and that you have a common enemy together, and that you need to refresh that marriage on an ongoing basis. You have kind of a concept you talk about of getaways—a daily getaway, a weekly, and then annual getaways—for you and Amy. Explain what you mean, and then, coach some folks on how to do that.

**Ted:** Yes; I was invited—one of the leaders in our church is Joe White with Kanakuk Camps. He sat me down one day; and he said: “Listen, you’ve got to have three getaways in your marriage if you are going to survive ministry / if you’re going to survive life. And it needs to be a daily delay, a weekly withdrawal, and an annual abandon.” These are all found in the Song of Solomon. The daily delay is in or around your home—it’s in Chapter 1, verses 12-17. It’s the En-Gedi—it’s creating an oasis—making your home an oasis in the midst of the grind, where you can get alone—15/20 minutes a day, sometimes, is all it is—where we’re connected: eye to eye, distraction-free, phones down / TV off.

For Amy and [me], it’s, a lot of times, right before dinner / it is right after dinner. We’ll do family devotions, as a family, and then, dismiss the kids—they clear the table—and Amy and I will stay there for another few minutes and drink a cup of coffee. So, we have to have that time every day. And again, we talked about safety—we want those to be safe times—we don’t have to discuss budgets / we don’t have to discuss the kids.

We put in this book hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of questions / conversation-starters—fill-in-the-blanks—because what we’ve discovered, with a lot of couples, when they do have that 15 to 20 minutes, it’s so routine. It is so script-driven that they have the same conversation over, and over, and over, and over again—like a movie actor memorizing lines and showing up to the set—that’s what these daily delays feel like. So, we’ve put a lot of helps in the book to help someone break out of that.

**Bob:** So, when the wife says, “So, what was your day like?” And you say, “I was in a bunch of meetings.”
Ted: “Good. Yes; it was good.”

Bob: “We’re done now; right?”

Ted: “We’re done now.”

“These are three places to travel after the kids leave home,” “One restaurant in New York that you’ve heard about or seen on the Food Network that you’d love to visit sometime. We can plan that.” I think that’s what is missing in a lot of marriages—is anticipation—picturing a special future. We’ve found that planning something breeds life into our marriage, even if we never do it—just talking about it, dreaming about it, playing and laughing together about it is so valuable.

And then, the weekly withdrawal—this is in the Song of Solomon, Chapter 2—where he comes to get her and says, “Come away with me.” So, now, this is somewhere outside of your home—away from your home but in town. This is our date night—and so important. We try to guard it. We don’t want any difficult strong conversations. We want those to be taken care of throughout the day so, when we go, we just unwind.

And what we’ve found—there was a gentleman at the table next to us. We just engaged with him. We were able to have conversation—and new to our town / about a week-and-a-half—inviting him to church—just spending time away from the routine. And in our town, it can be kind of difficult. We are a small town with 10,000 people inside the heart of Branson. So, we know most people when we go places to eat, or shop, or whatever.

But then, in Chapter 7 of the Song of Solomon is the annual abandon. This is where we need time away from this city. “So, come away with me.” She says, “Let’s go to the countryside,”—this is the Shulamite bride inviting Solomon away. We have found those to be a huge blessing in our marriage to where we plan an overnight—two- or three-day—getaway—

Bob: Away from your kids?

Ted: —away from the kids. That’s the number one reason people don’t take date nights or the annual abandon—is because: “We have kids and no money.”

Bob: Yes; so, what do you do with kids and no money for date night or annual abandon?

Ted: Kid co-op is what I call it.

Dennis: Yes.

Ted: You’ve got to get family and friends involved.
Dennis: Right.

Ted: We are blessed to have both sets of grandparents—retired down to Branson, Missouri. So, that helps us. If I could just add here: “Every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers.” Grandma and Grandpa make great backup singers / they make fantastic backup singers.

You want your children to have great marriages. I tell my parents: “I don’t really need gifts anymore at Christmas or birthday.” My parents are well into that stage of life where, every time I leave the house now, I leave with a box of something because they are tired of stuff. “Why don’t we exchange great relationships?” We’ve heard a lot of great stories about this—where grandparents are gifting their children, at Christmas, weekends at the grandparents’ house. I just think there is a bunch of ways to get creative with supporting the marriages of your children.

We are blessed with parents who want Amy and [me] to have a great marriage. And the greatest gift your child, as a mom and dad—who love each other, and care for each other, and enjoy each other—you need to get away and get your love jug / your love tank filled back up so you can come home and have something to give. So, give those weekend getaways.

Bob: Only a guy from the Ozarks would call it a love jug. [Laughter]

Dennis: That’s because he has worked with one from the Ozarks for so many years.

Ted: You make music with them and everything.

Dennis: The end of Song of Solomon—there at the end of Chapter 7—it says: “Come my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages. Let us go out early into the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded—whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.” Now, that’s a picnic!

Bob: That sounds like more than a picnic to me—that sounds like a Weekend to Remember®. [Laughter] It sounds like—it sounds like a couple getting away for a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. I mean, part of what happens at a Weekend to Remember is—you do get some time together—you get a date night / you get an opportunity to reconnect, as a couple. The Weekend to Remember is a fun romantic getaway for couples; and in the middle of it all, you are soaking in what the Bible teaches about God’s design for marriage and family.

We’re in the middle of our Weekend to Remember getaway season this fall—we’ve got getaways happening in cities all across the country. In fact, this weekend, we had a getaway happening in Augusta, Georgia. Then throughout the fall, we will have getaways taking place all across the country. A month from now, I’m going to be in
Parsippany, New Jersey, for our getaway there. Find out more about when one of these getaways is coming to a city near you and plan to be there for a *Weekend to Remember*. You’ll find out more, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or you can call if you have any questions—1-800-FL-TODAY is our number.

Find out more about Ted Cunningham’s book, which is called *Fun Loving You*. It’s also available, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order the book from us online or you can call to order. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY,”—1-800-358-6329.

You know, we believe that what makes a culture strong, what makes churches strong, what makes a society strong, is when marriages and families are strong. It’s been attributed to Abraham Lincoln—the statement that: “The health of a nation lies in the homes of its people.” Whether he said that or not, it’s true.

Here, at FamilyLife, our desire is to effectively develop godly marriages and families; because we believe that godly marriages and families are what can change the world. Every time you partner with us in this ministry—every time you make a donation to support FamilyLife—what you’re doing is extending the reach of this ministry. Your donation takes this message to more people, more often; and we’re grateful for that partnership to expand the outreach of FamilyLife through your donations.

In fact, right now, if you are able to make a donation, we’d love to express our thanks by sending you Dennis Rainey’s new book, which is called *Choosing a Life That Matters*. It’s all about the choices that we face and how the right choices can help lay a foundation for everything else in our lives. Ask for your copy of the book, *Choosing a Life That Matters*, when you make a donation at FamilyLifeToday.com or when you call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Or you can mail your donation to FamilyLife Today, PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk about the link / the correlation that exists between oneness in a marriage relationship and oneness between a creature and his Creator. We’ll talk about that with our guest, Ted Cunningham, tomorrow. I hope you can be back for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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