



Twoignite
A Love That Laughs
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, were talking about *A Love That Laughs*, bringing more fun, more humor, more laughter to your marriage. One of my goals in life is to make Amy Cunningham laugh because I love her laugh. Her laugh is what we call a silent, patriotic laugh. When she finds something funny, she will place her hand over her heart, lean forward, and nothing comes out.

I see it all the time. I've done six events in the last week and I see, ladies especially, for some reason don't feel as though they can let laughter out. You'll see something strike them as funny and they'll want to laugh, and they put their hand on their mouth and hold it in. I don't get it. Ladies, today, I want you to let the laughter out. When you hold laughter in, it turns to cellulite. I need you to let that laughter out; you don't want to hold it in.

A lady in our church gave me a great joke to start today with. This guy is being trained and he is day one on the Secret Service. He's walking the president out to the limo and a gunman appears. He yells "MICKEY MOUSE!!" Everybody was confused about that. They get the gunman and take care of him. A little while later, the supervisor asked the new guy, "We're all dying to know. Why did you yell Mickey Mouse when the gunman appeared?" He goes, "I was just super nervous with the first day on the job. I meant to yell, "DONALD, DUCK!!"

I know that joke is only going to work for another five years. Oh, I crossed the line for some of you. I'll come back from the line. No... And there goes one person. I always love the demonstrative leaves from a service.

Today, we are recommitting. We are one church that is committed to helping couples enjoy life together. For years around here, we've been finding ways, practical ways that couples can enjoy life together. My dear friend, Ted Lowe, leads a ministry called Married People. Hundreds and hundreds of churches around the country serving marriages, helping couples win, helping couples have fun, helping couples enjoy life together.

Here's what we base this whole idea on at our church. It's out of the scripture Ecclesiastes 9: 9 - **Enjoy life with your wife...** Now I love misquoting this at churches that have closed Bibles and it's not on the screen. With a preacher voice and a lot of passion, I'll say, "Endure life with your wife all your miserable days." When I'm at conservative churches, I'll get a moan with a "That's good." I've had a guy yell up at me, "Preach!" when I've said, "Endure life with your wife. And that's not what it says.

I love shooting that down when someone thinks that's what it says because this tone has found its way into the church and it goes something like this: God gave you your spouse to beat you down and suck the life out of you so you can be more like Jesus. That's not the tone that we take at our church. Here's what it says: ***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.***

Under the sun is the theme throughout all of Ecclesiastes. The *toilsome* word right there means *grueling*, that life is challenging. Providing for a family can be very difficult and in the midst of that, enjoy life with your wife. Your wife is not the grind. Your wife is your teammate, not your opponent.

As you read in Ecclesiastes... The book ends of Ecclesiastes are Chapter 1 – Life is hard to Chapter 12 – Then you die. These are the bookends. And in the middle of that, you get enjoy life with your wife, in the midst of life is hard and then you die. Solomon begins painting the picture of the Earth as a grind with these great word pictures of sun and wind and rivers.

Watch how it churns in Ecclesiastes 1 - ***4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.*** It's a theme throughout all of scripture and we talk about it a lot around here. It's that life is a mist, a vapor, but a handbreadth. We're here for a very short time and then we're gone. And when we leave, the earth remains. Now he's going to paint the picture of this grind of the Earth continuing to churn away. ***5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.*** The first word picture showing that grind. ***6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.*** ***7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again.***

Chapter 1 sets up this grind. By the time you get to Chapter 12 in the first five verses, it talks about your body finding its way into the grind. Truly life is hard and then you die. Welcome to our church today. We're glad that you're here. We're here to pick up your spirits.

When I was young, we had an evangelist that traveled to our church. He sold bumper stickers off of Ecclesiastes and my mom bought one. I remember it hung on the refrigerator in our home in Illinois for years. It was orange with black letters that simply said, based on Ecclesiastes, "Cheer up, you'll soon be dead." I thought what a great bumper sticker.

Here's the bottom line from all of this. **God did not give you your spouse to be the grind.** According to Ecclesiastes 9: 9, in the midst of this book talking about the grind, **your spouse is your companion through the grind.**

Let's be very clear today as we start. The enemy of your marriage is Satan. The source of your life is Jesus. I'll say it again. **The enemy of your marriage is Satan, not your spouse. The source of your life is Jesus, not your spouse.** And if you want to enjoy high levels of marital satisfaction, do not confuse your spouse as the enemy or the source. Your spouse is your companion through the grind. Today, we want to look at just one thing, one thing you can do. There are a lot of things you can do, but one thing you can do to increase marital satisfaction. Your spouse is your companion.

Scripture also talks about exclusivity. We read from Proverbs 5 - ***18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.*** Around here, we celebrate young, budding love. We celebrate dating, we celebrate young people pursuing dating and marriage. We're big fans of that around here. Sometimes, if people marry, especially if they marry young, they'll get a few years down the road and they'll think to themselves, *This isn't what I thought it was. We missed out on something,* but the scripture tells us to be intoxicated with the wife of your youth. We know from scripture that drunkenness is a sin. In Galatians we read, "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the spirit." The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faith, and self-control.

I have one friend in Wisconsin, a pastor friend. He has so much joy; I can't explain it. He has so much joy in the Lord, it flows through his veins and out his pores. He's always got a smile on his face. I don't have a smile on my face all the time. I get around him and it's infectious. Amy tells me I have a resting kind of frown. I don't have a resting smile. When I preach and even when I'm telling jokes, I'm always so serious looking. She said, "Every now and then, when you catch yourself not smiling, just throw a smile in there." That's why you'll see me, when I'm preaching, just throw a smile out there. That's as fake as can be right there. Trust me, I stand up here week after week. A lot of you don't have resting smiles either. But my friend has a resting smile and he is filled with the Spirit and he is full of joy. So much so that in the course of his adult life (he's in his sixties) he's had people accuse him of being drunk.

This is what we read in Acts 2, about the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descends on them. Some looked at them and the way they were acting and the tongues and all of that going on and they said, "They have had too much to drink." "Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit." And in Proverbs, we read that I should be drunk on the love of my wife. I should be intoxicated with this. I want to share this with the men in here. Be very clear on this. You should be intoxicated with the naked body of your wife. May you rejoice in the wife of your youth, finding joy in the wife of your youth.

19 A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always... And all the men said... Amen. ***may you ever be intoxicated with her love.*** When you get to verse 20, it says do not be intoxicated with the body of your neighbor's wife. That you would commit in marriage and find joy with the one you came in here with today.

Here's what we know: High levels of marital satisfaction are available for every single person in here. Marital satisfaction depends on factors and skills couples can do something about in any season or stage of life. There are only two things going on in your marriage right now. It's one or the other. You're either growing and thriving or you're drifting. Are you intoxicated with your marriage? Are you rejoicing in your marriage so much that you're intoxicated with your wife, guys? We say it around here all the time and it's a good reminder. "Where the grass is greener, there's a septic leak." You need to stay home and water your own lawn. And all Gods people said... Amen. For a good time, call home. And all God's people said... Amen.

Here's the bottom line. You can experience high levels of marital satisfaction with the person that you came in here with today. **Marital satisfaction is a choice, not an outcome.** It's not something you sit around and wait for. It's not something you hope finds you.

A lot of you met online. There is nothing wrong with online dating. A good match is a good start, but it does not guarantee a thriving marriage. You're either growing and thriving or you're drifting. Growing and thriving is based on decisions. Decisions have power. **Drifting is the absence of decisions.**

The one thing we are talking about today can bring you back to a place of growing and thriving, enjoying life together. But it's a choice, not something you wait for. It doesn't matter how you met: eHarmony, Match.com, OurTime.com, FarmersOnly.com... Ancestry.com. We don't care how you meet. I just did that line in Kentucky and they thought I was talking about them. I said, "I'm talking about Arkansas; I'm not talking about Kentucky." But I guess it's a bigger deal in Kentucky than it is in Arkansas. But marital satisfaction is something you choose. If you want a growing, thriving marriage, you've got to make the choice.

Today, we're going to talk about one thing, one thing you can do to experience high levels of marital satisfaction. I want to be really clear here as we dig through this. **Laughter is not the only thing that increases marital satisfaction, but it is one thing that helps couples enjoy life together.**

If you do the research on this... I've been studying laughter. Not just how to tell jokes, but the benefits of laughter, the value of laughter. Here's what we know. Couples who use laughter to manage stress and work through difficult conversations not only enjoy higher levels of marital satisfaction, but stay together longer, enjoying life together. Why? As we talk about the grind of life, it's very easy for our marriages to get caught up in the grind. Again, God didn't give you your spouse to be the grind; he gave you your spouse to go through the grind of life with.

Laughter, finding humor, helps us, husband and wife, cope through the grind of life. One preacher... This is my favorite quote on laughter. Henry Ward Beecher, a 19th Century preacher, said, "*A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs. It is jolted by every pebble in the road. Good humor makes all things tolerable.*" It's time that we cut loose, lighten up, don't take yourself so seriously, and enjoy life together.

Proverbs 17: 22 calls this laughter medicine – **A cheerful heart is good medicine...** Not only is it a good medicine, but it helps other medicines go down. It's why we use laughter so much around here. We hope while your laughing, we're cramming truth down your throat. Chuck Swindoll put it this way, "*Laughter is the most beautiful and beneficial therapy God ever granted humanity.*"

As I was writing, I was studying all the benefits that come with laughter, having so much fun. I wish I could share them all with you today, but here are just a few of them:

Laughter bonds us. As one comedian said, "It's the shortest distance between two people." **Eases tension...** That's why I love, in really tense situations, to try to get people in the room to laugh. Or at the gate and an airport with a four-hour delay. That's always a great time to throw in a little humor. It doesn't always work, but I still make the attempt. **Defuses anger.** But you have to understand there is an appropriate time for laughter and an inappropriate time for laughter. We're not here today to tell you that if your marriage is in crisis, just start telling some jokes to each other and it will be... We know the limits of laughter and there are some things you need to do first if your marriage is in drift or

disillusion, your disconnected, or headed toward divorce. We're not telling you to just start telling jokes to one another, but after you get the help you need for your marriage, that you would then pursue enjoying life together, a thriving marriage, a growing marriage to stay out of drift. **It lightens the mood, relieves stress.** I love this one, **it burns calories.**

One Vanderbilt University study showed that you can burn up to 40 calories with 10 to 15 minutes of good, hearty belly laughter. So, I hope you burn 100 to 150 calories today. No workout for you the rest of today. Enjoy laughing.

It makes us more attractive. If I can tell the single people in here who think they will never find someone. Listen, you don't need the face of Brad Pitt, you don't need the body of The Rock, and you don't need the ego of Tony Stark. You need a couple of jokes and a paycheck.

The online dating sights are really working this out because they know... Almost everybody says, "I'm looking for someone with a sense of humor." It's one of the biggest roadblocks to what we're talking about today. People tell me this all the time. They say, "This so easy for you because your funny." I'm not funny. Today is not about making you a comedian. It's trying to help you discover your shared sense of humor.

It makes you more relatable too. Ethel Barrymore said, "You grow up the day you have your first real laugh at yourself." When you laugh at yourself, it's telling your spouse, "I can't believe I just did that." "I can't believe I just said that."

So, let's spend a little bit of time on how we get this into our marriage. We want to make couples laugh again. I came up with this whole idea and I'm going to put it on a hat again, I think. It's original – Make Couple Laugh Again.

There are some very practical things you can do.

1. Turn everyday moments into lighter moments. We all get stuck in the grind of errands and school, dropping kids off and picking them up, and grocery shopping. There are two places in this town that every time I know I have to go in, I'm just immediately frustrated. No, I don't go to Walmart... I can't. I go to Target. You've heard me tell that one. I have told Amy, when I die, I want to be buried in the Target parking lot. That way I know she'll come see me three or four times a week. It's not Target,

And this isn't about the people who work there. The people who work there are great; it's the processes of these two places that wear me out. It's the License Bureau, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and the Verizon Store. You want to go in for a charger or something that's really a one-minute purchase, and they come in and they want to put you in the cue. You're going to be there an hour or two because the guy in front of you has never seen a phone and he's got to ask how the phone works... It's infuriating when you go in there. I can't go in anymore. It's not good for my faith, it's not good for my life as a follower of Christ. I just can't do it.

But then when I go to the License Bureau, I walk in with a stack of papers to get the thing I need, but you know I'm missing one piece of paper. I've got everything but one piece. I got on the website and found all the pieces that you need, but the one they decided last week to add. They're like, "Well, it's hanging on that piece of paper hanging 12 feet on the wall." Have you ever been in there? There are papers everywhere. It's like they got mad at something, so they did a sign for it and put it on the wall.

Do you want to know how to turn them into lighter moments? This is low hanging fruit. Singing and dancing. You say, "I'm no good at it." That's the whole point. The worse you are, the better it is. I made my whole family go with me because they needed it too. We had to get the license with the star on it. Do you know the best time to go to the License Bureau? It's between Christmas and New Year's, when everybody is off work. The place was packed. You want to bring more laughter and humor to your marriage? Just be standing in line, knowing there are 42 people ahead of you, and just start dancing, just start swaying. The reason you laugh is it looks ridiculous. It's simple. Anybody can do what I'm doing right now.

Peter McGraw heads up the Humor Research Lab, also known as HRL. He's been studying laughter for a long time. He says what makes people laugh is the shock of the brain. He watches this and helps comedians write humor and helps them figure it out because you want to shock the brain. He calls these shocks to the brain a violation. You see violations all the time, and that's what makes you laugh.

My friend, Jason Earls, is a comedian. He has one of the best bits I love on smoking in church. He has this cigarette he pulls out and he walks into church. He just does all this stuff like you've been doing this morning, but the reason it's so funny is because it's a violation. No one would think about smoking in church. He comes in and he requests a bulletin while taking a puff from the cigarette. He amens the preacher by taking the cigarette out of his mouth and raising it in the air. Then he worships. This is the one that makes me laugh. He pulls out the cigarette, takes a puff, and sings, "This is the air I breath, this is the air I breath. Your holy presence..." The reason we laugh is because you never think you'd see that. If you're in traffic, turn the radio on, turn that everyday moment, that air and that grind of life, that toilsome labor moment into a fun moment for you and your spouse.

2. Recognize and appreciate your spouses attempts. There are some men in here being set free in the Lord right now. They're like, "I'm funny and she hasn't figured it out yet." This is about finding your shared sense of humor. And here's what's great when you study laughter and humor. **Your mind can tell the difference between fake and real laughter, but your body cannot.** In other words, you can reap all of the benefits of laughter even when you're faking it. It still helps ease tension and relieve stress and burn calories.

You see, fake laughter is that forced laughter. Most of us sit around waiting for real laughter or the spontaneous laughter to hit us. I'm submitting to you that you learn how to fake it. MD Anderson, Mayo Clinic, Cancer Treatment Centers of America, that whole relieving pain... No one is claiming that laughter heals the body. No one is claiming that laughter cures cancer. But they have something called laughter therapy at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America. They have something called yoga therapy. They all sit around in a circle and they just fake laugh. They will all grab their stomachs and just start belly laughing.

After a while, the fake laughter turns to real laughter because it's so ridiculous. And laughter is like a yawn; it's contagious. You just have to fake it. The next time your husband tells a joke that you don't think is funny, fake it, laugh, and reap the benefits of that. Here's the bottom line between fake and real laughter.

3. Stop waiting for the spontaneous laughter and start looking for it. This is observational humor. Have fun with it. It's all around you. Humor is everywhere you look.

I was writing in the book. It just so happened I was writing the section on Fake vs Real Laughter. I was talking about looking for it and observational humor. It's why if you love Jim Gaffigan... He's the master at observational humor. He just sits around and looks at everything going on around him and the jokes come to him.

I was sitting at Panera Bread writing this and I was getting ready for my monthly or bimonthly coffee with Pat Kershaw. Pat Kershaw is an 84-year-old lady here in our church. She sits down and asks what I'm working on. I tell her what I'm working on and I say, "Hey Pat, have you seen anything funny lately? What's the last funny thing you've seen?"

She goes, "It was yesterday while I was getting a mammogram."

I go, "Oh, okay, well, here we go. Every pastor wants a good mammogram story from their members. Pat, what in the world are you..."

She goes, "You know, at Mercy, they've got verses hanging all over the walls." I go in to get my mammogram and the verse by the mammogram machine is 2 Corinthians 4: 8."

I go, "What does 2 Corinthians 4: 8 say?"

She goes, "For we are hard pressed on every side..."

I'm not done. You have to let me finish the verse. The whole verse is, "For we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed." That's looking for it, taking advantage of it.

Just last week, I saw it in a store. When you see it, call it out. Coca-Cola has a new box, a new 15-pack. We're going to do this slowly. We're not going to rush through the math here. We're going to make sure we all got it. There are 15 cans of soda in this box, which means there are three more cans than a 12-pack. And if you're not laughing right now, it's because you were raised on new math. And we're here to declare to you... Remember when your math teacher told you to show your work? Fifteen minus three equals twelve. I got five laughs off a box of soda in the grocery store. We're not talking about laughing at your spouse, we're talking about laughing with your spouse. Finding your shared sense of humor. It's all around you.

4. Surround your marriage with others who love to laugh. We have dear friends that we laugh... I mean I burn hundreds and hundreds of calories at dinner with them. We've talked about this. Sometimes we have to meet with people who the marriage isn't going that well. They may be in drift. And there's a burden that's placed... We say it around here like this: "Every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers." And some of you need new backup singers. Some of you have backup singers that you need to turn down or mute altogether. Others of you need to find them.

This is out of the Song of Solomon 1: 4, the young budding love of Solomon and the Shulamite woman. They advocate for the marriage throughout the whole book. They speak over this young, budding love. ***We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.*** I love to do that with young couples thinking about getting married. I love to be one that rejoices and delights and praises their love.

Do you have that person? If humor makes me more relatable and says, "I can't believe I just did that," humor, when you're with other couples is saying, "Yeah, that happened to us too." It's a quick way to identify friends. Do you have people you enjoy spending time with? Do you have people that you leave feeling refreshed and replenished? Surround yourself with people who know how to laugh and know how to enjoy life together.

5. Make time for laughter. There are three times that we talk about in the Song of Solomon. Number one would be the **daily delay**, that 15 to 20 minutes a day of eyeball to eyeball, body to body, distraction free, technology free, and kid free, and you're just keeping short accounts. You can talk about anything. It can be a little business meeting, but make sure there is plenty of laughter. Make sure you're prioritizing time to laugh. The next one would be the weekly withdrawal. This is a scene in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of Song of Solomon. In Chapter 1, the daily delay is speaking there of En Gedi. En Gedi is the lush desert oasis. The toilsome labor at that time under the sun... I love these word pictures from scripture. Under the sun... You've been in the desert all day. When you come home, let your home be En Gedi. Let it be a place where you are refreshed and rejuvenated, replenished, refueled, you can relax. May that be true of your marriage and of your family.

In Chapter 2, you get to the **weekly withdrawal**. The weekly withdrawal is that date night. The daily delay is in your home and the weekly withdrawal is away from your home, but in town. Solomon says to the Shulamite woman, "Come away with me. I want to go spend some time with you." If you're stuck in the rut of dinner and movie, you need to break out of that rut and try something new. Go roller skating. Your like, "Ted, my hips? I don't know for sure." I love roller skating. And if you haven't been to the roller-skating rink later, nothing has changed in the last 30 years. It's going to look very familiar. But do we not live in a great town for this? You can go do crazy stuff. Go go-carting. Go on Big Foot. Go axe throwing. That would be fun.

The **annual abandon**. This is in the Song of Solomon 7 where she says, "Let's get out of town. Come away with me, let us go to the countryside." En Gedi in the home, "Come away with me we're going out into the town," this is what she says. Now they are married in Chapter 7 and she says, "Come away with me. Let's go to the countryside." And then she says these words to her busy shepherd King Solomon, she says, "Come away with me, there I will give you my love." And the Hebrew term for that is bow bow chickie chickie bow bow. You need time away to laugh and enjoy your marriage.

Would you stand with me as we close out today? Here's the last thing. Here's why laughter is good, and I hope you're a ministry today as you go out into our town. Laughter is a sign of life in marriage. It signals to family, friends, and strangers, this couple enjoys life together.

Let's pray. Before we pray, I just want to tell you the prayer team is going to be down front. Many people came forward for prayer in the first service because you're in drift, you're in disconnection, you're disillusioned in your marriage, you're headed toward separation or divorce. We said this is one thing; it's not the only thing. And there is no way the leadership of this church would tell you to fix your marriage, just start laughing together and telling some jokes. You need something else and we want to point you in the right direction. We want to let you know where you can go to get help for a marriage in crisis. So, don't leave without coming down and meeting with someone here in the front.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we are grateful for a church that values fun and laughter. May we always be a church family that enjoys life together and that we gather and have glad and sincere hearts when we do. I pray for husbands and wives to enjoy life together, that they go out and find their shared sense of humor that they are more directed in it and looking for it and desiring it. May that be true of the marriages coming out of this church.

For the one struggling, the one hurting, that they would not leave today without getting the help they need from someone in our prayer team, that they would come and seek you. If they have turned their spouse into the source or the enemy, that today they would be redirected to see what it means to turn their spouse into a companion through the grind of life.

We pray all of this in the good name of Jesus and through the authority of that name. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.