



4Dates 4Weeks
Part 2 – Quality Couple Time
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We launched a series... It was a different Sunday. A couple of Sundays ago, we thought we were ending the series and then we added Part 4 going into the inauguration. And who knew that Bernie Sanders would be the star of the inauguration? The memes were priceless. I had one included, but I took it out because they've all been seen.

Today, we're in Part 2 of the series, *Quality Couple Time*. If you are brand new to our church or you're tuning in for the very first time, we issued a challenge to our congregation last week called 4Dates 4Weeks. There are really two things going on. One, there is the #4Dates4Weeks, where we did a competition this last week. In the past seven days, we were looking for the most creative dates, so stick around; we're going to talk about that at the end and award the winner of most creative date. But if you go on four dates in four weeks, at the end of this competition, you'll be able to register by saying, "We did the challenge – all four dates." That's going to put you in a drawing, and we are going to draw one couple that can either choose Water Color Inn at the Beach down in Florida, or they can go to Blackberry Farm in The Smokey Mountains. We will be drawing that on Valentine's Day, Sunday, February 14.

We've been doing this little competition and today we are talking about quality time, but we're going to jump right into Matthew 19. Jesus is going to give us foundational teaching about marriage. In that day, there were two schools of thought, and in this school of thought, they were coming to Jesus, trying to trap him. There was a conservative school of thought – Shammai. They thought that divorce was only acceptable under immorality. But the more lenient group – Hillel – thought it could happen... A husband could divorce for trivial reasons, anything that displeased the husband was a reason to divorce.

In Matthew 19, this question is going to be asked of Jesus and he is going to answer it, not by getting into this debate. He doesn't enter this conversation between the two. Instead, he goes straight to the scripture. He's going to cover Genesis 1 and 2 as he teaches about marriage. **3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"** So, this is probably coming from the more lenient group. For trivial reasons... Can a husband put away his wife if she's done anything to displease him?

And Jesus doesn't enter the debate he says this: **4 "Haven't you read..."** and he's going to go straight to scripture. When we talk about any issue in this church, scripture drives the bus. We always go straight to the scripture, especially when we're talking about marriage, we say, "What have you read?"

And Jesus starts in Genesis 1. *...he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female...'* I am raising my son to embrace his biological sex and marry the opposite sex. I'm raising my daughter to embrace her biological sex and marry the opposite sex. Male and female he created them. If someone is challenging me by saying "Do you believe in science? I do, male and female, he created them. And he gave Adam one wife, not two. That's because he couldn't handle two! Can I get an amen on that one? And he gave Eve one husband because she could only handle one husband, and all the women said... amen! It was one man and one woman for one lifetime. Jesus is establishing this. This is the foundational teaching.

When you start to blur the lines between male and female, you start to throw God's plan and his created ordinance for marriage out the window. But Jesus says, "Haven't you read?" The Creator... What we are about to talk about in marriage, this isn't my idea, this isn't your idea, this isn't the government's idea, it's the Creator. He made them male and female.

5 and said... Now he's going to go to Genesis 2 in Verse 24. **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother..."** The word *leave* here actually means *abandon* or *forsake*, meaning your children are not supposed to be with you forever. They are supposed to leave. They are supposed to abandon us. They are supposed to forsake us for their own marriage. We don't want our children sticking around forever. Can I get an amen on that one? We want them gone. We love them. They are welcome addition to this home, but they won't be with us forever; we've got to get them out of here.

Somebody asked me recently, "Do you require that your 16-year-olds get their driver's license? I'm like, "Are you kidding me? I require that they have their license and their own car by sunset on their 16th birthday." Because they are not supposed to be with me forever. Somebody started debating a little bit online. It was fun to watch because these are friends, so it was a lighthearted debate. Somebody said, "I didn't make my kids get their license until they were ready."

I didn't even know that was an option. Because a lot of the stuff my kids have done over the years, they weren't ready for. And, one day, when I ask them to leave, they may not be ready for that, but guess what? We don't care. "Do you feel like you're ready to get out there on your own? Bye-bye. We've given you everything. We've poured into you."

The word here is *man*, meaning we don't send our children out of the home as adolescents or as children. By the time a kid leaves our house, they should be adults, prepared for the responsibility of work and relationships. And they need to leave Mom and Dad. This is the leave and cleave text. So, they need to leave Mom and Dad, physically. The relationship changes emotionally, financially, and if necessary, geographically. But they are supposed to leave. A lot of the troubles I see with couples in marriage is that they have never really fully left home.

Jesus is saying, **"For this reason a man..."** This is where marriage begins. It starts with you leaving your father and mother and Jesus is establishing here the most permanent bond in human relationships, which is between a husband and a wife, not a parent and a child. He says, **"...will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."**

Can I just say to those who are tuning in, to those who are here on campus today? When you are here teaching on marriage, there are many that are watching, many that are here who have been divorced. Here's one of the things I notice often with those who have been divorced. They begin to think they have less value. Maybe you were told over and over again, through years of a terrible marriage, that you're worthless, but I want every divorced person watching and every divorced person in here to clearly understand you were created in the image of God. You have automatic, intrinsic value. Your divorce did nothing to your value. Your divorce did not bring your value down. I want you to remember you are loved by God and cared for in this church. It's why for years we've run the ministry *Divorce Care*. We want to care for people.

But here's the tension we always have. We're a church that believes we should fight for marriage and help couples thrive in their marriage. But we also believe we're equally supposed to be a church who cares for those who have been through divorce. You're like, "How do we reconcile that tension?" Guess what? That's just a tension we have to live in. You need to know, as we talk about marriage, you are in a new marriage and your value has been... and you feel worthless. That's a feeling, not a fact. It's something you feel, but it is not true about you.

Out of this teaching that Jesus gives us from Genesis 1 and 2, the foundational teaching on marriage, we get four spiritual journeys, and they are in this order.

Four spiritual journeys in the home.

The first spiritual journey is **Your spiritual journey**. You are 100% responsible for your journey. Your walk with the Lord, that is 100% your responsibility to tend to.

Then there is **Your spouse's spiritual journey**. So, if you're here today as a couple, this the husband's spiritual journey and this is the wife's spiritual journey. You're owning your journey and then there's your spouse's spiritual journey that you get to care for without taking responsibility for. Your spouse is 100% responsible for their walk with the Lord and their spiritual journey.

After this, you have the **Marriage journey**. If you've ever been to a wedding that has the wedding candle after they exchange vows and rings, these candles represent these three spiritual journeys.

Some of you have asked me to do some crazy things around this church. I've done sand art. I've braided cords together out of Ecclesiastes. Somebody gave me a puzzle to put together once that I was unable to do in the ceremony and I don't even know if they are together anymore. That's a true story. I don't even know who that couple was, but don't give the pastor a puzzle to put together and get all that pressure on him in your ceremony. Stick with the basics. Let's get traditional with this.

So, you've seen it. The mom of the bride walks up and lights the candle. What does this represent? It represents the bride's spiritual journey. Then the mom of the groom steps up and lights the groom's candle. These are the first two spiritual journeys. Your spiritual journey and your soon-to-be spouse's spiritual journey. Then after we exchange vows and rings and we sing whatever your song was. You come together and you light the unity candle. This represents oneness, a one-flesh marriage.

Now, maybe you grew up watching a lot of weddings. I did. My mom's side of the family were all Catholic and one of the reasons I always like to bring candles into our service is to make the Catholics feel welcome in a non-denominational church. What would happen after the couple lit the unity candle? They would blow out the individual candles. I did that for years as I started in ministry.

Then, Bob Paul... I was initiating his daughter's wedding. He came up to me and said, "I have only one request." Bob is the architect of the Marriage Intensive Program at Focus on the Family – Hope Restored. He said, "After they light the unity candle, please do not allow them to blow out the individual candles. I asked him to explain that to me. He goes, "Here's what I need them to know. As soon as they enter into marriage, they are still responsible for their spiritual journey." And some of you have seen the marriage where one or both decide to blow out their candle. You've seen where one stops pursuing their relationship with the Lord. Maybe the lady is still going to Beth Moore studies and her flame is big. You've seen this happen. He goes, "Just don't allow this."

These are the first three spiritual journeys and then this is where it gets fun. I love to pull out a bunch of little birthday candles. These represent all the little candles you're going to have running around the house one day. And that's the fourth spiritual journey. **Your child's spiritual journey.** Guess what? Your children have a front row seat, Mom, to your spiritual journey. They have a front row seat to dad's spiritual journey. They have a front row seat to the marriage journey. This is why it makes no sense to put the child's spiritual journey first.

Deuteronomy 6 says they are watching. From the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night, your children are watching, from the things you say when you sit at home, walk along the way, all though out the day. They've got thousands of hours a year that they are watching your spiritual journey.

And these spiritual journeys all include this idea of time, okay? I need my alone time with the Lord for my spiritual journey. Amy needs her alone time with the Lord for her walk with Christ. We come together... And this is what we are talking about today, the marriage journey. We need quality time together. Do you know what I see with too many couples as I'm counseling or coaching? I see couples who want to fix the marriage journey because something is broken. They are disillusioned, they're disconnected, they're headed toward divorce. Something is broken right here, and they think they've got a marriage problem. But I tell you that almost every single time, you don't have a problem with the marriage journey, you have a problem with the individual journeys. Either one or both.

Let's talk about these before we address this. That's why if you've been through Marriage 911... We have dozens of Marriage 911 counselors in our church. And you will know, as you call, because the marriage spiritual journey is in crisis, you will meet individually to discuss your spiritual journey for 13 weeks with someone. And then we watch God do miracles in the marriage. So, we need time, just Amy and I, that's quality time there.

And then your child's spiritual journey is quality time as a family. Years ago, at a family camp, I had a guy come up to me and go, "I don't buy any of this. You can't prove any of it. We're just a family and we

only spend time together as a family. We don't need to date. We don't need alone time. It's only about family." I said, "How many kids do you have?" He said, "Four." I said, "Well, you've done something alone at least four times." I have very low patience for stupidity. That's just the dumbest thing I've ever heard. I hope you are in alone time. And if you're doing this well, these journeys (child's) will increase, the number of them.

But this is so important for us to discuss because **quality time, as we talk about it today, with each other tells our family and friends, our children that our marriage is important.** We're making this a priority.

And you know **the longer you're married, the less you date.** I could show the research for this, but this is so basic that it doesn't need a study to prove this because we allow drift in. We looked at it last week and it's why we're talking about it in this series. **What was natural early on must become intentional later on.** I heard a guy this week, a colleague in marriage ministry say, "Don't only make your time together intentional, make it intense." I love that. Prioritizing quality time is one thing, but think through what you're going to do in this time.

Amy and I, and I'm assuming many in here and watching online would agree with this. We spent a lot of time together in 2020, more than we have in previous years. But there was a moment where she shut the door for a private conversation between the two of us in 2020, saying, "Hey, have you noticed we've been a little snippy with each other?" This was about late April. She said, "We're sitting on lawn chairs for long periods of time." So, we're not just talking about time, we're talking about quality time. There are a lot of studies out there. I just love studying marriage research. I love to follow Dr. Scott Stanley from the University of Denver and Brad Wilcox from the University of Virginia. I get a lot of research from them and then teach principles, factors, and skills off of it.

Years ago, Gary Smalley loved this one. He talked about how the more expensive your appliances are in your house, the lower risk you have for divorce. And I thought, *Amy, don't keep throwing that one at me.* But then I read one just yesterday talking about engagement rings and looking at the correlation between the price of an engagement ring to marital satisfaction and your risk for divorce. I'm not going to give you all the details because you'll get bored. But you are 1.3 times more likely to divorce if you spent between \$2,000 - \$4,000 on the engagement ring. And do you know what the sweet spot is for price on an engagement ring? Do you know what a guy yelled in the first service? He yelled, "40 bucks!" I yelled back, "How long have you been married?" He goes, "40 years!" I go, "So I ain't gonna question you my brother." Yeah, \$500 - \$2,000 is the sweet spot to achieve high levels of marital satisfaction.

Put that one aside, but this is also from Brad Wilcox. The National Marriage Project of the University of Virginia studies something every year. In this particular study in 2011 they studied the quality of date nights and initiatives around the country. A lot of their research and a lot of their studies and their projects are presented to state legislatures, even Congress as possible legislation in the importance of promoting marriage and family in our culture. *The National Marriage Project, led by W. Bradford Wilcox and Jeffery Dew, found that those who spent quality time together at least once a week were 3.5 times more likely to report being 'very happy' in their relationship compared to those who didn't.*

When we were starting this church almost 19 years ago, I went over the Kanakuk, K1, and Joe White sat me down for breakfast. He said, "So, we're starting the church and I assume you're starting a family..." We hadn't had our first child yet, but we were talking about it and getting ready. He said, "I'm really concerned." I asked about what and he said, "My fear for you is you're going to throw all your energy into this church and all of this energy in your kids and your marriage is going to suffer." He said, "I want to give you a challenge. The next time we meet for breakfast, come back with your plan." I leaned in thinking this guy is going to give me gold. He said it that day. I memorized it that day and, for probably the last 15 years, I've shared this with couples all over the country. It's three chapters in the book I wrote, "Fun Loving You."

But here's all Joe said, "Every marriage needs a daily delay, a weekly withdrawal, and an annual abandon." A daily delay is 15-20 minutes a day of eyeball to eyeball, body to body, distraction free, kid free time. It's a little business meeting. Amy loves business meetings. You've heard me talk about this. She sits down and says, "Okay, I'm going to start by going over the minutes of the last meeting and you can approve or object, whatever you need to do. And then I'll get into the agenda for today. You don't have to write any of this down; I'll send you a follow up email." So, that's our daily delay.

A daily delay is important. For us, it works great in the morning because we have our time alone with the Lord early in the morning, our daily delay is early in the morning. It sets our day off right. We know not every couple can do that. So, you have to pick your 15-20 minutes. And your 15-20 minutes might be right after work. I want to encourage you. We do have this from studies as well. Typically, the first 15-20 minutes of reconnection time at the end of the day is not the best quality time. Most couples report that. They're just saying on the way home, you think about things that need to be done around the house and sitting down eyeball to eyeball and face to face, it's not going to be as productive as if you give me 30 minutes or I give you 30 minutes and we wait an hour. For some, it might be after dinner and for some it might be right before bed. Prioritizing the daily delay.

I'm super proud of this church and we'll share the details in a moment of your **weekly withdrawal** this week. Hundreds and hundreds of you went on dates throughout this community and you prioritized quality time. For some of you it was at home. Some of you got really creative at home, others went outside of the home. Typically, in pre-COVID times and hopefully after COVID times, the weekly withdrawal is away from the house and in town.

Then the **annual abandon**. This has been one that Amy and I have really struggled with. It's probably what we've mourned the most. You know my wife loves big cities. That's why every time she sees a big city going through the struggles on TV, it's almost like mourning. It really is mourning for us because we've seen spots where we've walked by. We just love the diversity of big cities, the food of big cities, the walking in big cities. She loves the walking in big cities and will walk me 15 miles a day in these big cities, and she's missing that. But that annual abandon is the out of town to somewhere, and we'll talk about each one of these, starting with the daily delay.

There are these great word pictures in Chapters 1 and 2 of the Song of Solomon. There are a lot of work pictures. I'm only going to give you three that describe their time together. If you are brand new to Hebrew poetry and you are brand new to the Song of Solomon, you'll see that there is a main character

in Solomon and a main character in the Shulamite Woman, and this is their duet and they are singing these lyrics back and forth to each other.

In Chapters 1 and 2 they are dating, in Chapter 3 they get married, in Chapter 4 they have the honeymoon. But watch some of these word pictures. In Chapter 1: 13, she compares thoughts about Solomon to a sachet of myrrh. Did anybody here ever have a grandparent that kept spices in the underwear or clothing drawers? What it did was just scent the whole wardrobe. In this day, women would lie down with the sachet of myrrh resting between their breasts so when they would wake up, the smell would be lingering. She is saying, "That's what my thoughts about this shepherd king are like. I can't get him out of my mind."

Do we have any dating couples in here that are understanding what I'm talking about? Your performance at work has plummeted because you're thinking about him, because you're thinking about her. I worked at the Lowes Distribution Center for a couple of years in Valdosta, Georgia right out of college. We had a safety board because if it hit whatever number, we got a free steak dinner. They cooked for everybody. It was awesome, but we were always watching out for the people who recently fell in love because they were going to be the ones causing the accident. You're getting on a fork lift or something. Get your head in the game.

But the Shulamite woman is saying, "I can't stop thinking of this guy." Then we get this other one, the next verse, a beautiful one – **the vineyards of En Gedi**. The world is the desert, but when I come home, I want my home to be En Gedi. En Gedi is this lush desert oasis. Words to describe En Gedi would be refreshment, rejuvenation, relaxation, restoring, replenishing, great words. I don't want for any couple in our church to pull in the driveway at night and be like, "Ugh, give me one good reason to go in there right now. Because I know going in there is going to be just..." She says, "When I am with him, and what we're creating here and what is coming together is refreshing to the soul." This is why you have to be intentional with what was once natural because your home, your marriage, no matter how long you've been married, can be En Gedi.

And then the Shulamite woman describes of Solomon... She calls him **an apple tree**. I told Amy, "You need to give me that as a nickname; I love that nick name." "Hey, apple tree, come here for just a second." She describes, "I can fit under it's shade. He gives her protection. I can reach up and get a little snack." Protection and provision. So many other great word pictures of safety and caring for one another in this.

But that's the daily delay. Think through that as a couple. What is your time to sit down, be eyeball to eyeball, face to face, right there together? Maybe early morning, maybe later at night. Let it be a little business meeting.

Here's why it needs to be a little business meeting. You want to have the little business meetings all during the week to protect your **date night**. Don't ruin your date night by talking about the budget, by talking about the kids. Nothing sucks the life out of date night faster than fighting over money or working on schedules. Put that in the daily delay and prioritize the weekly withdrawal.

We get this in Chapter 2. The Shulamite woman is describing Solomon coming to pick her up for a date. I just want to encourage the guys, as we read this, to think through you initiating the dates. I have to get better at this. I know have to get better at this. It's so easy on Open Table to make reservations so, "Amy just make us a reservation," but you're not going to see that in this text. I'm looking around at a lot of senior men that are like, "We're empty nesters. It's date night every night." Splash on a little Old Spice, change your underwear, and pick her up for a date. There are guys groaning in here right now.

Watch! It's a beautiful word picture in Chapter 2. **8 Listen! My beloved! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains...** I want to see that in every old man in this place. I want a little skip in your step as you show up to pick her up. **...bounding over the hills. 9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.** Be like the gazelle, guys, like a young stag. Put some thought into it.

Do you know what this picture that's being painted for us is? It's anticipation, excitement. There are guys in here giving me the... You weren't wearing a mask the entire time and you just put it on so I couldn't see your face. Listen, don't surprise her with a date. Don't show up Thursday night at 5:00 to take her out for dinner at 6:00. You just wasted Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Tell her today that you're taking her out Thursday so she can think about it all week. Let me tell you something: you're going to score more points with her thinking about it than the actual date. Because a woman never stops thinking, all week long she'll be thinking and wondering about it.

It's anticipation and we get that in the next text. **Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.** If you are new to Hebrew poetry, you're like, *this guy is a peeping Tom, this is kind of creepy.* It's not a peeping Tom, it's anticipation. Every time I read this text, I think about going to Dorm 23 at Liberty University with five other guys lined up. You'd hear the girls walking down the steps and I would be looking for Amy. He's excited. He's ready to pick her up and take her away. Guys, it's time for us to pursue her.

10 My beloved spoke and said to me, "Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. He's picking her up, he's taking her away. **11 See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone.** We get this beautiful picture of dating. It's moving from winter into spring and then into summer. **12 Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."**

Come on, guys, spend the money. Go on a date with her without a coupon. Y'all just got these stimulus checks and 78% of Americans are saving them. It's not a savings check; it's a stimulus check; spend it. Use some of this socialism for dating. I want to see everybody get out there and get dating.

That's the weekly withdrawal, but then you have the **annual abandon**. So, the daily delay is in the home, 15 -20 minutes. The weekly withdrawal is date night. Let's go 60 – 90 minutes or 2-3 hours. But then you get the annual abandon. I love this. We find them in Song of Solomon 7. So, they are married, they are back from the honeymoon, they are going through life, and the Shulamite woman is going to invite the busy shepherd king for a night out of town. Let's continue to teach this and look at what the word of God says about it.

This has been a challenge for us. We tried to make a trip out of a comedy event I had in Washington D.C. in October. We went into the hotel. We were the only people in this hotel a block from the White House. The whole bottom of it was boarded up. I was like, *this ain't anything that I thought it was going to be*. I asked the guy where I park. He goes, "Do you like wine?" What does that have to do with anything. "Because I'd like to give you a bottle before I tell you how far away you will be parking." So, even if we're able to schedule stuff right now, it's not awesome, but that's okay because Amy and I are talking about annual abandons we plan on taking after COVID. That allows our weekly withdrawal to be intentional. We can talk about it on our daily delay. It's a blast and maybe I can take her to places maybe more that Fairfield Inn in Batesville, Arkansas.

Here's what she says. She invites him out of town. **11 Come, my beloved, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. 12 Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom—there I will give you my love.** And the Hebrew term for that is *bowm, bowm, chicky, chicky, bowm bowm*. She is saying I want to be intimate with you and we have to leave the kids here with someone safe. We're leaving them with grandma and grandpa. We're leaving them with friends. We're trusting them and we're getting out of here. For some of us... I know, I still have plans for annual abandons. We miss our annual abandons because of the ones Amy and I both like to take, but it's going to come around. And we can still plan them and get excited about them.

Here are the roadblocks that I often hear from couples, why we don't spend the quality time you're talking about with these weekly withdrawals and annual abandons. The first one is money. It's too expensive. You know you don't have to be crazy, ridiculous expensive with this, but I also want to challenge you to budget this. If you're driving a car with 200,000 miles on it and you're thinking about buying a new one, I would encourage you before you buy a new one, think about what you could do with some money to prioritize quality time together. And don't be that person that comes on Facebook when someone is celebrating a date night, celebrating an annual abandon, don't be that downer that goes, "Well, it must be nice to go on vacation." Yeah, you can plan it, you can budget for it.

The other one we hear is we have kids. "We have no money and we have kids." But we have grandparents. Can I get an amen for the grandparents? But we also have friends. You take your kids over on Tuesday night, drop them off and go on your date night. Then they drop their kids off on Thursday night. Do some kid swapping in all of this.

Then the other one is time. "It's just not a real great season for us right now." "This isn't a great stage of life for us." We looked at it last week, but we're talking about factors and skills that can help you achieve high levels of marital satisfaction in any season or stage. Right now, we're looking at the factor or quality time. And, yes, you can be intentional about this in any season or stage.

So, we've put the challenge out there – 4Dates 4Weeks. I want to be really clear about this. If you're competing in the week-to-week challenge, that's great and that's all that the hashtag is for. The hashtag is not qualifying you at the end of this. At the end of this, we're going to open up the app and you're just going to go in and say, "We did our four dates," and your name goes in the drawing. So, it's really kind of two things going on here. But we're ending this whole big spectacular with Date Night Comedy and

I've invited my good friend, Johnny W. to come and headline that for us. We've never had him here. We've had a lot of great comedians over the years and you're going to love Johnny W. He traveled with Tim Hawkins for years and I need you to know... This is very important, online and here on campus, tickets go on sale today at 1:00 pm. And we only have 400. Last Sunday, we had 1,430 on campus. We know another 1,000 plus of regular viewers at home. So, if you want to go to Date Night Comedy, get your ticket this afternoon, we think it's going to sell out fast. That's just what we're doing because we're still doing the social distancing.

I'm so proud of you all. Last week, we logged... and it maybe more than this. This is just people who used the hashtag. Two hundred and fifteen couples went on dates in the past seven days. I think that is worthy of celebrating as a church. The challenge last week was most creative, and you made it too hard on us to pick. You really did. I saw everything. The first one I saw was a couple that are tattoo artists, and they were coloring on a mannequin. I had questions. Like, do you have a mannequin sitting around your house and once this beautiful work of art was completed, what are we going to do with this mannequin? Some of you did that. Others went to the rage room to let out some frustration. That may have been more the adventurous date. My daughter and her boyfriend made a Branson Monopoly game that Amy and I joined them on a double date.

What we did was we had a committee. I'm not involved in this at all. We just asked this group, and you don't need to know their names, but Mackenzi and Katie got alone and picked out the most creative and there were many of them. They put them in a drawing and drew. The winners are Julie and Aaron Michel. Let me tell you what they did. It's a little creepy, but it's creative. They went up to random strangers and asked if they could have dinner with them at Cracker Barrel and pay for the dinner. This is Rex and Jody, married 54 years. You know they got in their car afterwards going, "You know, we like how hospitable Branson is, but that was a little much right there. I don't know, are we coming back to this town." But they won. They tried it with one couple and the couple was meeting somebody so that didn't work. This was their second attempt and they made new friends, so we're sending them on another creative date, we're giving them \$75.00 to Café Cusco, which we love. It's that Peruvian place up in Springfield, \$100.00 to Wonders of Wildlife, and \$75.00 to Firehouse Potter.

This week, the challenge, starting today going all the way to next Sunday, is the most adventurous date. Be careful but be adventurous. Get out there. We can't wait to see what you record. What I've loved about this is the whole point of doing it. Somebody was texting me just before this service. They stole someone's idea. That's the whole point. We love for you to be inspired by another couple in the church. Matt and Katie went on a dinner that did like three or four places at The Landing and somebody saw that and they did the exact same thing. That's the whole point of this, us spurring one another on, encouraging one another in this. So, happy dating!

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we first and foremost think about the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, and they are wanting a great marriage that today would be the day they start that journey, their walk with you by placing faith in Christ by confessing their sins, believing in their heart that he has been raised from the dead, confessing with their mouth that Jesus is Lord. I pray that we all spend that quality time with you, walking with you, and then allowing our marriage journey and our family journey to follow.

I pray for the couple right now in crisis, that they wouldn't try to fix their marriage with their marriage, but they would fix their marriage with this journey. I pray for all of those in our church who are working with and encouraging couples. Bless them as they are backup singers to the duets all around them. And for every duet in this church, whether on campus or online today, that they would be encouraged and challenged and that these kids that call Woodland Hills home, that call this church, would see a mom and dad who are prioritizing their marriage and enjoying life together.

We pray all of that in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.