



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Laughter of Life, Love, Kids and Marriage

Guest(s): Ted Cunningham

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk, it's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast ministry of Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. You know, life can get pretty heavy sometimes, can't it? Between work pressures, raising kids, and just trying to keep everything together, we all need moments to step back and simply laugh. That's exactly what we're bringing you today here on Family Talk. A healthy dose of humor mixed with biblical wisdom.

Our featured presenter today here on Family Talk is Ted Cunningham, founding pastor of Woodland Hills Family Church in Branson, Missouri. Ted's not just a pastor; he's also a comedian who brings joy and laughter to couples all across the country through the Date Night comedy tour. Ted believes that a cheerful heart really is good medicine and his unique blend of humor and spiritual insight, has helped countless families find joy in the midst of life's challenges. So sit back, relax and get ready to laugh as we dive into today's special presentation from Ted Cunningham on the laughter of life, love, kids and marriage on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Ted Cunningham: I've been in Branson 18 years. My wife's actually with me tonight, Amy. She's sitting over there with our staff from Woodland Hills Family Church in Branson. We meet in an abandoned theme park and we laugh a lot. We have fun together. One of the critiques our church has received in town is there's too many people and they laugh too much. To which we say, "If you don't like laughter and lots of people, you're probably not going to like Heaven." Thank you. Where's Lord mercy right there? Can I get a Lord have mercy on that one right there? Okay.

But I met my wife Amy on a blind date at Liberty University. Can I hear all the LU grads out there? The night I met her on Smith Mountain Lake, I told my buddy, Austin, "I'm going to marry this woman." And he said, "You can't decide that." I said, "I already did." And I walked into the kitchen of her six foot two, full-blooded Norwegian father, and I said, "I'd like permission to marry your daughter." To which he responded in his thick Norwegian accent, "You betcha." I said, "But only under one condition." I had just graduated. She had one year left. I wanted to break all the rules, get married before her senior year. I said,

"I'll only marry her before her senior year if you allow me to pay for her senior year of college." To which he said, "You betcha." And young guys push back on me all the time. They say, "How can you afford to get married at 22 and 21 and pay for a senior year of college?" And I say, "It was this thing called a job." I had a job and more than one job. It is possible to get married and grow up together. Can I get an amen on that one?

I don't encourage people to rush marriage, but you can get married and grow up together. We did. And I tell guys all the time that go, "Bro, I can't get married that young. I can't afford to get married." I'm like, "Bro, I would believe that if you weren't holding a venti caramel macchiato in your right hand and an iPhone 11 in your left. You need to start thinking Folgers and flip phones, bro."

And I don't believe you started marriage right until you get your parents hand-me-down mattress. Can I get an amen on that one? The dip already built in. You get in, you roll to the center. That's a good marriage. I tell young people, you don't go to Ethan Allen to get your furniture, you go to Home Depot. You get 1 x 12s and cinder blocks. That is a great way to start marriage.

And so that's my wife Amy. We have a daughter, Corinne, who is 16, just started driving and she is the princess of our family. When she was five years old, I had to tell her, "There's only one queen in this house and you ain't her." And she looked at me with those eyes that said, "We'll see, we'll see." The next day she told my wife, there's room enough in this house for two queens. I sat her down on the breakfast bar. I said, "Uh-uh, uh-uh. No. Let me tell you something. You are not the queen." I said, "One day a little boy's going to say the words 'I love you' and I need you to know he's a liar. He is of his father, the devil and a child of darkness. You stay away from any boy that says I love you, but" I said, "you're not my queen, but you're my princess. And that means one day I'm going to stand at the back of a church with you and give you away to become another man's queen." And my parenting plan is simple. I want to show her every day how a queen should be treated to the best of my ability and one day stand at the back of a church with her and be confident that he loves her as much as me.

I have a son, Carson. He's 14 and just started high school and he has always been the comedian of our family. We were at Disney when he was very young, like three years old, fell asleep, he was almost four. He fell asleep in the middle of Epcot center and I held him for about three or four hours back to the hotel, get there, lay him down in bed. And as soon as ... my legs are shot, my arms are shot, I'm exhausted. As his head hits the pillow, his eyes open and he says, "Gotcha." Now it's at that moment, I don't know, should I spank him or should I be proud of him? I had a lot of mixed emotions going on.

So I want to encourage you tonight as those who serve, as those who pour into others, and I thought it is very fitting to start by encouraging all of us to thank all of those who are standing right now serving us. Would you help me thank them for a wonderful meal?

So I asked the Lord for a prop years ago with my kids. I was so exhausted with the blame game. Anybody tired of the blame game in your home? You come in the family room and you're like, "What is going on? There was perfect peace in here 10 minutes ago." "Well, she started it." "Well, he licked me first," and I'm going, "Ugh." I was drained as a young dad when our kids were small. And I said, "Lord, give me something to teach them about codependency." It's hard to teach a five-year old and a 7-year-old about codependency. But I said, "I can't handle this anymore."

And I believe he did, and I want to give it to you and hopefully you'll use it in your home. Maybe you'll use it in church or in your practice, but I simply call it the love jug. I keep a \$5 banquet jug under our sink and did for years when our kids were young, but this love jug represents the heart, the wellspring of life. And whenever the blame game would creep into our home, I would pull the love jug out and the kids would be like, "Oh no." They knew a lecture was coming. They so hated the love jug lecture that once my son said, "Dad, would you please give us a spanking instead. Would you? I don't, I don't want the love jug."

Love jug's out. Lecture begins and I set it down on the counter and I would just ask them, "What does this represent?" And I'll demonstrate it as Carson. He would go, "It's the love jug." I said, "Yeah, what does it represent?" "It represents the heart." I got a picture of him at five years old. I said, "What verse do we use?" And he goes, "Proverbs 4:23. Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." And I would say, "Carson, who's responsible for your heart?" "I'm responsible for my heart." "How much are you responsible for your heart?" "I am 100% responsible for my heart." "How much is your sissy responsible?" "She is 0% responsible for my heart."

You see why they wanted a spanking? This therapy that young, it takes a lot out of them. And then I'd go over to the sink and I'd start filling it up. I say, "What does this represent?" "It represents God's love." "That's right. And this is why as a family, we pray together, we do devotions together. We read the Bible together after dinner, we talk about the Lord from the time we get up to the time we go to bed at night, as we sit at home, as we walk along the way, we're wanting to always talk about the Lord. We want to be as full of God's love as possible."

And here's where the illustration gets fun. I go over to the cupboard and I just start grabbing all different shapes and sizes of glasses that represent the people that we will be pouring into throughout the day. And the illustration takes a little while. I'm giving you the condensed version and you see why they want me to rush it at home, but these represent all the people I'm going to be pouring into and I want to be as full of God's love as possible. And who's the first person I want to pour into? Lord have mercy. Who is it?

Audience:

Amy.

Ted Cunningham:

Amy. Thank you, my wife. And this glass represents her. And if women do speak more words than men, I want to make sure I have plenty of words left at the end of the day for her. And then after Amy, I want to pour into my daughter and my daughter has a lot of words and I pour into her. And my son Carson, I pour into him. He's been easy to pour into. He's my man. Bear Grylls, *Man vs. Wild*. He likes the outdoors. Years ago I said, "What do you want to do this weekend?" He goes, "Oh, let's go into the woods with nothing but a canteen and a knife and survive." And I don't know if you can tell by looking at me, but I don't scream survivalist, but we did. I took my son into the woods and we survived. What he didn't know is we were surviving in the woods right behind Cracker Barrel. That's kind of how we got through the weekend. Now, this is just an observation, but I've poured out over half and that's just my family.

My parents retired to Branson 18 years ago from Lucent Technologies, and my dad for the last 18 years has watched *Fox News* 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And when I come in the house, I'm like, "Hey dad, how's it going?" To which he responds, "Well, we're going to hell in a hand basket. That's how it's going. The world's falling apart. There ain't going to be nothing left for you kids. That's for sure." My dad really knows how to picture a special future for his kids.

I got, no, let's talk about it for a second *Fox News* enthusiasts. You cannot watch the news cycle, repeat every 30 minutes all day long and be any sort of happy at the end of the day. You can't. Those are all the *CNN* people clapping right now, but I do, I want you to hear the sound ... that's what's happening. It sucks the life out. Same thing with social media. If you spend all day on social media comparing your life to the highlight reels of everybody else, you're not going to have anything left. It drains you. It doesn't fill you up.

My mom, she just wants me connected to the family. You just stay connected to the family. All I have to do is come in and say, "Mom, I talked to Andy today," my older brother, and she's like, "You did? How's he doing?" I said, "Mom, you talked to him today too. You know how he's doing." And she wants to hear me talk about her other son. Isn't that true? Look at the moms in here. "I do. I just want to know they love each other and they spend time together." So that's all I have to do to pour into my mom.

This little shot glass here represents my mother-in-law. You do not want to give her too much. My family doesn't really like my talks; I got to be honest with you. But I haven't even been to work yet. Think about it. You haven't even been to the church yet. You haven't even been to the office, and you know your first appointment is going to suck the life right out of you. And the whole way in you're feeling pretty full, but you know there's one person ...

I gave this talk to all the Chick-fil-A owner operators, and I encourage them, "Hey, be passionate about your work. Allow Chick-fil-A to be your source of income, but don't allow it to be your source of life." And my mentor, Dr. Gary Smalley, he defined it this way, never plug into people, places, or things as your source of life. You know why this illustration worked with my kids? Because I

think this is at the root of it all. What we do is we pour into people all day long and we're on empty, and then we sit around waiting for them to pour back into us and we're frustrated, we're stressed. I just said the thing to Amy I know she likes to hear. I just did the thing I know she likes me to do. When am I going to get a little something, something coming back at me?

You want to know what the most miserable marriage on the planet is? A husband and wife connected to each other as the source of life. The best marriage on the planet, a husband and wife firing each other as the source of life, connecting to the true and only source of life and giving each other the overflow. That's a great marriage. So let's do that right now. Raise your right hand and repeat after me. Raise your right hand and repeat after me. I.

Audience: I.

Ted Cunningham: Do hereby resign.

Audience: Do hereby resign.

Ted Cunningham: As general manager of the universe.

Audience: As general manager of the universe.

Ted Cunningham: And my spouse.

Audience: And my spouse.

Ted Cunningham: Now look to your spouse if you're here with your spouse, and point to your spouse and say these words that are going to set you free in Jesus, "You're fired."

Audience: You're fired.

Ted Cunningham: You are no longer my source of life. Somebody's like, "You will no longer suck life out of me." But this is when marriage gets fun. When you begin serving one another with zero expectations. My wife has two love languages, acts of service and quality time, which means I serve her for long periods of time. That's what that means when they come together. And in the middle of those two love languages is a hidden love language called decluttering, known as pitch, pitch, pitch. She lives by a core value. If you haven't used it in a while, you don't need it. Not true. Where does she start with decluttering in our home? It's always the garage. She goes out and gets the garbage can on wheels, flips the lid back and like a grocery cart around the garage, she starts holding up one item at a time and says, "Are you still using that?" I'm like, "Babe, that's a hammer. I think every home's entitled to at least one hammer." Into the garbage it goes.

When she's in decluttering mode, I am running around the house yelling to the children, "Quick, save your stuff. Mom's coming. You better hide it if you want to keep it." Your spouse is not your source of life. And can I tell you, your children are not your source of life. We pour into our kids. We've fallen for the faulty input output theory of parenting that says, whatever I pour into my child is what I will get out of my child. And the Hebrew for that is, "Ha." Not true. In the Greek, it's baloney. It is not how this works. This will free you up. You can serve your spouse, your children, your work, your parents, your in-laws with zero expectations of anything being poured back into you because you know who your true and only source is.

We have a favorite sandwich shop in Branson called Sugar Leaf. And I got up to use the restroom one day and I look over and there's this old couple, mid 70s, mad. I mean they're ticked off. And I have a face that screams retail. I can't explain it, but I go in stores and restaurants all the time and I'm asked, "Excuse me, do you work here?" Anybody else have this problem? Let me just see. We have faces that scream middle management. And so I'm so tired of it. I don't fight it anymore. I just say, "How may I help you?" That's my standard response.

Well, I notice on my way to the restroom, this couple mad, that I'm like, "Okay, I got a second." So I walk over and I simply ask, "How was everything?" And he says, "I got to be honest with you. We're pretty frustrated." I said, "I hate to hear that. What seems to be the problem?" He said, "Your sign outside said bratwurst. And we stood in line for 20 minutes waiting for bratwurst. We get to the front, you're out of bratwurst." Now I'm only 45 and I know I'm in Branson. We have a lot of senior adults, but I can't wait for the day in my life when the biggest issue of my day, I mean the thing that really ticks me off is a store being out of ... I mean, I'm just going to go off. I can't wait.

And some of you are like, "He should take this more seriously. This is a big deal." So I said, "Sir, what can we do to make this right?" It started to change his tune. I said, "Sir, what if I get you a piece of pie?" Now he is no longer mad. He is no longer frustrated. So I go, I stand in line, I buy him a piece of pie, I bring it back, I set it down in front of him and he starts asking me questions about the restaurant. And I'm like, "Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa. I don't work here. That's my family over there." My entire family waves from across the restaurant. I go back, I'm so excited. Something is coursing through me. I'm like, "Did you guys see that? That was incredible. That was fun." Why? Because you served. You poured, wanting nothing from them.

Have you ever had anyone leave your church mad? I guarantee it's because they were serving or giving with massive expectations. But what if we do as Jesus called us as he said, "The Son of Man has come to serve, not be served." Pouring it out. Some of you're stressing over all the wrong ... Do we have any parents in here right now with toddlers? Let me just see. You got toddlers. You got toddlers? What are their ages? Two and a half. And you're here.

Are they with grandparents? They are with grandparents. Two and a half. Do you have any grandparents sitting at your table? You're grandparents? Okay. Do you know this couple you're sitting next to? You don't? They're at your table. Listen tonight, I want you to get to know them. I want you to buy them breakfast tomorrow. No. No. I'm not kidding. They're going to help you. You know what? You got antibacterial product hanging all over your purse. All right. She used to let her kids pick up cigarette butts and chew on them. Look at it and she's going ... I don't usually get that. I get very conservative Christian women. "No, I never would never let my kids pick up that" She did. Hey, and you pal. You go talk to him because he used to let his kids sleep in the back window of the car on long trips. You now strap them in like you're launching them to outer space, right, buddy? They used to put three kids in one playpen with only one toy. It's where we got the idea for cage fighting. That's true. You can look that up on Wikipedia. I read that on the internet.

Raise your hand if you remember drinking out of garden hoses. Yeah, we're all fine. We all survive. Mom, the two and a half year old's going to be fine. Raise your hand if you've ever been shot by a BB gun. Look at that. How many of you remember when your dad would come out and help you build a ramp to jump your bike over the ditch? Then he would rate your jumps. How many of you remember when your dad couldn't figure out which of your siblings was at fault so he just spanked all of you? How many of you remember that? Those were good days. How many of you remember when your dad sent you upstairs to wait for your spanking? That was worse than the spanking. How many of you remember when your dad sent you upstairs to wait for your spanking, then he forgot that he sent you upstairs to wait for your spanking, and you and your brother are sitting there. "Do we tell him? Should we go remind Dad we're still up here?"

And as soon as you had that thought, you heard your dad coming up the stairs. You heard the belt hitting every loop. I'm going to be attacked by therapists after this session. "Ted, can I talk to you?" No, I'm fine. That's what I'm trying to help this mom with. I'm fine. But my brother was stubborn. He'd sit on his side of the bed, be, "Oh, Dad ain't going to break me." I'm like, "Are you kidding? I'm screaming on the backswing. Ow." How many of you remember when your mom spanked you with whatever she had handy? Anybody remember that? I still flinch every time I go into the kitchen. I've been spanked with every utensil in the kitchen. How many of your parents told you the bell on the ice cream truck meant they were out of ice cream? Those were good days.

Roger Marsh:

Well, laughter certainly is the best medicine indeed. And I don't know about you, but I needed a good chuckle today and we certainly got one from our friend and speaker here on Family Talk, pastor and comedian, Ted Cunningham. Now if you missed any part of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share Ted's humor and wisdom with someone who could use a good laugh right around now, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. While you're there, you could also learn more about Ted's ministry at Woodland Hills Family Church in Branson, Missouri.

And also his books like *Fun Lovin' You* and *Greater Joy Together*. Again you'll find all that information and more at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

You know, strengthening families requires both wisdom and joy and here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we're committed to providing biblical guidance for every season of family life. During the month of June, we have an extraordinary opportunity before us. Several generous ministry partners have come together to offer a matching grant, and that means every donation you make will be doubled dollar for dollar now through Monday, June 30. When you support Family Talk during this matching opportunity, you're helping us bring hope to struggling marriages, wisdom to overwhelmed parents and encouragement to families facing difficult seasons. To make a secure donation toward the matching grant, go to drjamesdobson.org or give us a call at 877-732-6825. And as our way of thanking you for your financial partnership, we'll be happy to send you a copy of Dr. Dobson's outstanding book called *Your Legacy*, along with the companion DVD. In this timeless resource, you'll discover how to be intentional about your children's spiritual training, how to find hope for reaching prodigals and you'll also learn proven principles for building lasting relationships with your kids and grandkids. Now this powerful guide will help you build a spiritual heritage that will bless your children and grandchildren for generations to come. To have your gift matched and receive your thank you resources, visit drjamesdobson.org, or call us at 877-732-6835. You can also give a gift through the mail. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk P.O. Box 39000 Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949.

Well I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of Dr. James Dobson and all of us here at Family Talk, thanks so much for spending some time with us today. We encourage you to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.