**Choosing to Enjoy Married Life**

By Ted Cunningham



Don’t you just love those commercials for online dating services with the happy couples twirling around the screen. The tone of the commercials screams fun, fresh and exciting. But have you ever thought about the disillusioned husband or wife watching that commercial and thinking, “Why isn't my marriage like that? I'll never have that kind of fun or passion in this relationship.”

Contrary to our culture's message that chemistry and compatibility are essential to an enjoyable marriage, character and commitment are really the essential qualities. Many happily married couples have found that a fun, loving marriage is more about the daily decisions they make and not as much about what they have in common.

Most couples are different in a variety of ways. One spouse may define savings as money in the bank; the other spouse defines savings as the difference between the actual price and the sale price. One spouse likes to sleep with the temperature in the house set at 75 degrees; the other spouse prefers 69.5. Some couples are complete opposites in their personalities, television-programming, and pizza-topping preferences.

At some point, getting on the same page should no longer be the goal. At some point, trying to change one another should become less and less of an interest and driving force. And, it’s not necessary to have complete agreement on every issue. Instead, wouldn’t it be nice to simply agree to enjoy life and each other for the rest of your time on earth. You, too, can decide to enjoy life and marriage — no matter how many challenges you may face.

In Psalm 90:10, Moses reminds us that life is a grind: "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."

It doesn't matter how much money we make; we can't buy our way out of the grind. However, in the midst of the grind, Solomon encourages us: "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life" (Ecclesiastes 9:9).

A fun, loving marriage is not shallow or immature. It requires plenty of hard work, taking couples beyond just enough effort to stay together. It’s spouses who possess character who make the decision not to divorce, but to stick with their marriage.

### Make the decision to enjoy each other

Having character and being a responsible adult doesn't mean you must always be serious. On the other hand, you don't need to be a comedian to enjoy life and each other. To create a fun culture in your marriage and home, start with minutes, not hours. Commit to cutting loose and having fun together for at least 15 to 20 minutes a day.

### Make the decision to avoid ruts

Identify areas where you're stuck in routines. When you get stuck in marriage and life, you might blame your spouse for being the source of the problem, question your compatibility, close your heart and ultimately doubt your future as a couple. The grind of life can create a vacuum of intimacy, laughter and fun in marriage. But you don't have to allow duty and responsibility to trump passion and creativity. Break routine by establishing a fresh date night. Avoid the standard dinner and movie — try roller-skating, kayaking, hiking, jumping on a trampoline or renting a bicycle built for two. Plan a "staycation" (a stay-at-home vacation) without the kids. Shop for and prepare a multicourse, fine-dining meal at home. Whatever you choose, make it a new experience that gives you time to dream, play and laugh together.

### Make the decision to value your spouse

Think of this as "mining for gold." Miners drill test holes, excavate the ground and process soil — all in the hope of finding gold. Although there are no guarantees, they work hard for a payoff that could be huge.

Be a great miner in your marriage. Start by looking for things you value about each other. Write your nuggets in a list. You can call it, "The Fun Loving You List." Here are some examples:

His list for her might include:

1. I love her "all or nothing" passion.
2. I love her disdain for driving directions.
3. I love her spontaneity.

Her list might include:

1. I love his concern for my comfort.
2. I love his fiscal responsibility.
3. I love his exaggerated humor.

Every time a frustration or difference of opinion surfaces, “mine” for more nuggets and add them to your lists. Regularly return to the list to remind yourselves that your spouse is highly valuable. We cannot control the circumstances thrown at us by the grind of life, but in whatever situation we find ourselves, we can decide to pursue a fun, loving marriage.