

TEAM  
US

STUDY GUIDE

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# INTRODUCTION TO THIS STUDY

How can you and your spouse better become a unified *team* in your marriage?

This is the primary question that my book *Team Us: Marriage Together* tackles. Through the use of stories and biblical principles, it seeks to give couples, like you and your spouse, practical ways to cultivate and strengthen unity on a daily basis within your marriage.

You may have noticed that the book itself includes “Us Time” conversation starters at the end of each chapter, so why a study guide too?

While these questions encourage dialogue with your spouse, this eleven-part study can help you dig even deeper. Each lesson corresponds with an individual chapter, offering you time to reflect, discuss, and afterward put what you’ve read and talked about into action. It may even give you an excuse to watch *The Princess Bride*.

This study guide is ideal for couples or small groups, but it can also be done individually. Feel free to use it in the context that best benefits you and your marriage. Its main purpose is to inspire and equip you to approach your marital relationship with an “us” rather than “me” attitude.

It’s my prayer that as you work your way through *Team Us*, you be drawn closer together as a couple, freshly inspired to use the joining of your hearts and hands in a unique way for God’s glory!

Ashleigh

# LESSON 1:

## Why “Team” Is Important

### READ

Read *Introduction to Team Us* and Genesis 1-3.

### REVIEW

Why is this concept of “team” – that is, people coming together to collaborate toward a common purpose or goal – important within marriage? Be cause it is God’s idea, from the beginning! As we read through Genesis 1, 2, and 3, we see that Adam and Eve aren’t just the first married couple we see in Scripture, they’re also the first example of a human *team*. During those early sin-absent days, Adam and Eve model for us God’s perfect design for our husband and wife relationships. This God-created, God-ordained *team* points us to qualities toward which we should strive in our post-Fall marriages. They were united, cooperative, and committed. We can be, as well.

### REFLECT

Think about your marriage. Take a few moments to reflect on *your* personal attitudes and behaviors, not on those of your spouse. How has your sin complicated – like it did for Adam and Eve post-Fall – you and your spouse’s ability to be united, cooperative, and committed? Make a list of ways *you* could better cultivate these qualities in your relationship.

### DISCUSS

- Could you relate to my statement on page 13 about “wearing blinders” when I got married? How did the glaring realities of post-newlywed life affect your relationship? How can you better deal with your disappointment, or enjoy your differences?
- What common goals did you and your spouse bring to your marriage? How have they changed, and how have they remained the same with time? Consider how God might be giving you a sense of your common goals now.
- In what ways are you and your spouse better together than you were apart? Make a list. How can you make the most of the positives?

### ACT

Set aside some time as a couple to enjoy a few episodes of *The Amazing Race* on Netflix or Amazon Prime. Which teams are most successful? What qualities set them apart? Which teams do you find yourself cheering on the most? Why? How can you become more like the teams you admire?

# LESSON 2:

## Grace Like Sweeping

### READ

Read *Chapter 1 of Team Us* and the *Curling for Dummies Cheat Sheet*.

### REVIEW

Have you ever watched curling matches during the Winter Olympics? One year I found myself hooked. Just like this sport of “chess on ice” requires *strategy* and *intentionality*, so does marriage. I think it’s safe to say that every team, whether it’s in curling or marriage, does better with them. Yet it’s sweeping – or grace – that helps bring home the gold. Grace is to marriage what sweepers are to curling. Just like the two sweepers’ primary job is to ensure that rock follows its “house”ward trajectory as closely as possible, grace helps marriage stay on that heavenward “until death do us part” course.

### REFLECT

If you were to compare your marriage to any sport, what would it be and why? Think about the emotions this sport elicits in you. Are they positive? Negative? A mix? Now think about what sport you’d like your marriage to feel more like. What are some practical ways you can move toward that?

### DISCUSS

- What are two or three ways you’re intentional in your marriage? Affirm a few specific things you do well. Now brainstorm a few ways you can do better.
  
- How do you practice grace in your marriage? Discuss a time this week you could have offered grace, but didn’t. What is a specific way you can do better next time?
  
- Like George’s story on pages 26 to 28, is there something trivial that’s disrupted the unity in your marriage? How could you have avoided this?

### ACT

Like Ted and I did, create your own war room. You can do this at the park or in a coffee shop or even at your own dining room table. Spend some time writing down qualities you’d like to see better characterize your marriage. Talk about ways you can work toward each one.

# LESSON 3:

## Goodbye Me, Hello Us

### READ

Read *Chapter 2 of Team Us*. In the dictionary, read the definitions of *patience* and *persistence*.

### REVIEW

Saying goodbye to “me” and hello to “us” is a process. The happy melding of two lives doesn’t happen instantly. Often the *single* habits we bring to marriage make this transition even harder. That’s why it’s important that we be persistent and patient on a daily basis with ourselves and each other. It requires teamwork as we commit to killing ingrained habits that steal joy from our marriage and extend patience as the other does the same. Four practical ways we can do this is by picking our battles, having a realistic view of ourselves, sandwiching our criticism, and focusing on progress, not perfection.

### REFLECT

When it comes to your habits, do you have a realistic view of yourself and how your behaviors may need to change? Think about the times you’ve been inclined to give *yourself* a break, but not so quick to give *your spouse* one too. What is one maybe-not-so-good habit you’ve let yourself slide in that you can commit to persistently seeking change in? Mentally list some action steps you can take this week.

### DISCUSS

- When you got married, did you realize marriage would require so much change? What took you by surprise? Chat about the habits you’ve brought to marriage which you thought would die quickly, but haven’t.
- Is there an area that’s caused conflict in your marriage that you could solve by compromising a bit, by striking a bit more of a balance? Brainstorm some practical ways you can do this.
- How do you handle your spouse’s grating habits? If you were to sit down and evaluate your attitude in this area, would the scale tilt more toward Shakespeare’s degrees or a certain fickle Goldilocks’s posture?

### ACT

For fun, watch *The Princess Bride* this week with your spouse. Take note of how Inigo Montoya’s patience and persistence finally paid off!

# LESSON 4:

## **Yours, Mine, and Ours**

### **READ**

Read *Chapter 3 of Team Us*.

### **REVIEW**

A friend once told me, “The balancing act of being allowed to be two separate people inside of a one-flesh marriage” can be hard. She’s right. It’s one more reason marriage needs teamwork. The truth is we aren’t going to share *all* of the same interests. But, when we choose to work together toward the common good of our relationship, instead of focusing on the places we feel disappointed or our likes rejected, it becomes easier for us to appreciate, not despise, the other’s uniqueness. Three ways we can do this is by building on our common interests, choosing not to force change where it doesn’t matter, and learning to stretch by taking an interest in something our spouse likes.

### **REFLECT**

Have you faced an unexpected disappointment in your marriage? Perhaps like Ted, your spouse isn’t so gung-ho about the holidays. Or, like my friends Dave and Liz, you don’t share a love for board games or a passion for music. If you’ve kept your feelings hidden and allowed them to create tension in your marriage, spend a few minutes praying for wisdom on how to make yourself vulnerable and share them with your spouse. Ask the Lord to help you let go of any hurt feelings.

### **DISCUSS**

- Can you relate to my *Hunger Games*’ campaign? What are two or three interests you don’t currently share? How do they affect your relationship?
  
- What’s an area you’d like to “stretch” in? Jot down one or two things, along with a few “action steps” on how you can step out of your comfort zone.
  
- In what ways has being married made you a richer individual?

### **ACT**

Pick your favorite common interest that you and your spouse share. Plan this week’s date night around it.

# LESSON 5:

## Conflict 101

### READ

Read *Chapter 4* of *Team Us*.

### REVIEW

When it comes to conflict, we can choose to approach it as either a “me-first” or a “team-first” fighter. While a me-first fighter looks out for his or her own self-interest, a team-first fighter chooses to navigate conflict in a way that benefits the long-term health of the marriage. Team-first fighters have an “other-first” mentality, a desire to understand where the other is coming from, a peace bought about by shared interests, less concern for personal reputation, are willing to extend grace and understanding, are ready to relinquish the need to be right, and put forth a concentrated effort to speak positively of the other.

### REFLECT

Think about how you’ve personally handled conflict lately. Go through both the me-first and the team-first list of characteristics. Which characteristics on the “me-first” list cause you to wince with conviction? Which of the “team-first” characteristics do you see practiced in your relationship? Which ones could you improve in?

### DISCUSS

- When it comes to conflict in your marriage, do you relate more to me in my early days of marriage or to Ted? What about your spouse? Who are they more like? How can you both work toward be better team-first fighters?
- Has there been an instance when you’ve let the sun go down on your anger? How has this either hurt or benefited your relationship?
- What can you do better to approach conflict as an adventure rather than a threat?

### ACT

Sometime this week, watch an episode of *I Love Lucy* or, if you don’t have access to this 1950’s classic, watch *Everybody Loves Raymond*. Feel free to laugh at the antics, but also take note of the negative ways they handle conflict and purpose to do differently in your marriage.

# LESSON 6:

## A Lighthearted Marriage

### READ

Read *Chapter 5 of Team Us*.

### REVIEW

I believe laughter in marriage flows from unburdened hearts because an unburdened heart is a light-hearted heart. Why? Because it's one that's not weighed down by grudges. It's difficult to feel light-hearted and at ease in a relationship if we're keeping tallies on each other. There are four guiding principles Ted and I have found helpful when it comes to having a lighthearted marriage. We team up, give in on the small stuff, make payback optional, and choose – even when it's difficult – to let go.

### REFLECT

Think about the times your spouse has offended or hurt you. How have you responded both in the moment and long-term? Are you quick to let things go or do you allow grudges to fester? If you're prone to grudges, take some time to examine your heart and ask the Lord to help you grow in your ability to let things go.

### DISCUSS

- When was the last time you and your spouse laughed together? If laughter doesn't come easily or often, why do you think this is? What can you do to change that?
  
- How do you approach the small stuff? What are ways you can do better in compromising in the little things?
  
- Do you keep tabs on payback your spouse owes you? If so, does this hurt or help your relationship? Are you open to letting go of keeping tabs?

### ACT

Actively look for an opportunity this week to give in on something small with your spouse. Put into practice our 49 percent/51 percent policy and see what happens. If your spouse doesn't seem appreciative, be patient and keep at it.

# LESSON 7:

## The Lost Months

### READ

Read *Chapter 6 of Team Us*.

### REVIEW

Television's Jack and Kate and John and Hurley aren't the only ones to feel "lost" at times. Ted and I have too. Through our own plane wrecks – of the metaphorical kind – we've learned that marriage doesn't shield us from experiencing seasons where, as author Jeff Manion states, "life is not as it once was, where the future is in question." We've realized that division was not acceptable. Lines in the sand or blame had no place in our marriage. In order to successfully navigate the ambiguity, we had to face it as a team, together.

### REFLECT

Dreaming together is one way you and your spouse can continue to write a shared narrative. Think about the last time you and your spouse dreamed together of a goal, a project, or a shared experience? Was it recently? Or has it been far too long? If it's been awhile, purpose to dream together this week. If you need to, start small. Dream about a future date night or what you'd like your next staycation to include. But be intentional to take steps to write your story together.

### DISCUSS

- Have you or your spouse ever felt lost in the Land Between? What was your attitude in the process? Did it help unite or divide you as a couple? In what ways?
  
- What are a few ways you choose to "live together" in unity in your marriage? Are there ways you could do better?
  
- Do you feel comfortable dreaming together? If not, what needs to change in order to bring freedom to be vulnerable with your dream-sharing?

### ACT

Take the 5 Love Languages quiz at <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/>. Share your results with your spouse and discuss how you can better fill each other's "love tanks."

# LESSON 8:

## **Pink Slips and Other Losses**

### **READ**

Read *Chapter 7 of Team Us* and Ephesians 6:10-20.

### **REVIEW**

Sometimes I sit back and wonder how we made it through our weeping years. But here we are, still married, still friends, and still liking each other. It wasn't easy to remain united when loss and debt and a house that wouldn't sell desperately fought to pull us apart. While an attitude of "us vs. the problem" helped, we realized we couldn't stop with the idea of Ted and me against the world. What really carried us through was our dependence on the Lord and the support of our church community.

### **REFLECT**

Think about the tough times you and your spouse have faced. Have you been able to be honest with your thoughts and feelings? If so, make a note of what you believe enabled this. If not, what do you think inhibited it? Jot down a few things you can work on that might help you connect even more deeply.

### **DISCUSS**

- When you and your spouse are tempted to turn against each other, what are some ways you could band together and apply the words of Ephesians 6:12? Be as specific as possible.
  
- What is one way your spouse has encouraged you in your relationship with the Lord? How have you encouraged your spouse in their relationship with the Lord?
  
- Are you active in your church? What are some ways that together as a couple you can be a part of showing God's love to others there?

### **ACT**

Make a list of the ways God has been faithful to you as a couple. Tape it to your fridge or bathroom mirror as a reminder of His goodness even in difficulty. Feel free to add to the list in the coming weeks.



# LESSON 10:

## The Friendship Inventory

### READ

Read *Chapter 9 of Team Us*.

### REVIEW

The friends we keep do make a difference in our marriages. It's important that you and I are purposeful in whom we bring into our confidence. We can determine which friends to confide in by asking ourselves three questions: (1) Do they esteem marriage? (2) Do they view the opposite sex with respect? and (3) Do they build up my marriage and not just me?

### REFLECT

Evaluate yourself on the friendship inventory. If you were to rate yourself on whether you esteem marriage, view the opposite sex with respect, and build up other marriages, how would you do? Think about what areas you're strong in and which ones you could do better in. If you could use growth, purpose to make changes in the areas you didn't rate so well in.

### DISCUSS

- Think about your close friends. Would you say they encourage you in your marriage? Why or why not? In light of your answer, how might you talk with your friends?
  
- Are you open to the gentle correction of a friend? Or do friends seem to withhold it because you don't take it so well? How can you better invite constructive criticism from your friend?
  
- What's your church life look like? Are you seeking out community there? What can you do to be more involved?

### ACT

If there are any friends you need to have a heart-to-heart chat with, pray about the best way to approach them. Then schedule a time to get together and talk. Don't forget to sandwich your concerns by affirming and praising them for what they're doing well in your friendship.

# LESSON 11:

## Finishing Well

### READ

Read *Chapter 10 of Team Us*.

### REVIEW

Finishing well as a couple comes with the culmination of many years. There's no doubt about it. However, those monumental anniversary celebrations aren't what ultimately determine the actual direction of our marriages. Rather, it's the here and now. It's those daily decisions we make individually and together that influence how our relationships fare in the long run. Because of this, it's important to be purposeful to live out the day-to-day in a way that positively affects the years to come, that encourages us toward the finish line united. Making today's decisions with a long-term perspective and having a realistic view of our own weaknesses can help us do this.

### REFLECT

Think about your family history. Like me, do you have generations of couples who have stayed married? Or like Ted and my friend Danielle, does your family tree include broken relationships? Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord to give you wisdom on how you can keep your marriage on the death-til-us-part heavenward trajectory.

### DISCUSS

- What are some ways you are intentional in the day-to-day of your marriage? How do you think these actions will affect your marriage in the long run?
- Are there any short-term decisions you make with a long-term perspective? Are there areas where you aren't doing this, but should be? How can you do better?
- Imagine you and your spouse fifty years from now. What do you see? What can you do now to affect your marriage trajectory so that you might realize what you imagine?

### ACT

Visit a cemetery this week. Walk slowly through it and read the epitaphs. Think about your marriage as you do. What do you want those closest to you – your children, your friends, your family – to say about your marriage when it's wrapped up? What can you do now to help make such a legacy a reality?