

TEAM
US
MARRIAGE
TOGETHER

ASHLEIGH SLATER

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INTRODUCTION

I Do, Of Course

If I get married,
I want to be very married.

—AUDREY HEPBURN

“**OUR SINGLES PASTOR SAYS** I should just marry you,” the man across the table informed me before taking yet another nervous bite of his cucumber salad.

The man across the table . . . that was Ted. This was our first lunch together.

Ted and I had hung out before. Sure, lots of times. Always with a group of friends, though. Never just the two of us. This was something new.

I’d met this crazy-haired, piano-playing, website-designing man my first semester of grad school. I wish I could say it was love at first sight, but it wasn’t. I was so consumed with my twelve credit hours and my full-time job that I honestly don’t remember our first introduction. Had I known I’d go on to marry him, I’d have paid closer attention.

Once the fog of that semester cleared, random thoughts of this guy who I’d definitely labeled as “interesting”—in a charming, not creepy sort of way—seized my unsuspecting

12 mind. When he extended me a friendly invite one Sunday morning to a Bible study later that week, I felt compelled to go.

Before I knew it, there I was two months later, sharing a booth with him at a local deli. Our discussion that afternoon didn't seem to fit our surroundings, though. It was more becoming of a place that serves carbonara and tiramisu, not ham on wheat and carrot cake. After all, what guy throws out commitment-invoking phrases like "marry you" at a sandwich joint on what wasn't even an official date? It was more like a hey-what-would-you-think-of-possibly-dating kind of lunch.

Now, don't worry. Ted didn't go on to propose to me right then and there. Although Ted put a lot of stock in the opinions of our singles pastor, Eric (especially since he'd been a close friend of Ted's for over a decade), I'm not even sure Eric was serious when he tossed that idea Ted's way. What I do know is that he detected something special in the excitement Ted expressed about me.

Fact is, Ted was much too calculated when it came to life-changing decisions to propose to me on a whim. Plus neither of us were "there" yet. We still had a lot of "getting to know you" to do before we were ready for a serious step like marriage. Ted remembers his words that day with an I-can't-believe-I-said-that laugh and comments, "Add that to the list of things not to say on a first kinda-date."

Little did either of us know that a proposal wasn't far off, though. Within that calendar year, Ted would do more than just tell me Eric's views on our blooming relationship. He'd propose. And I'd accept with what Ted still claims was a "Yes, of course!"

That December, I'd go on to win the prize for the happiest bride.

The Happiest Bride Ever

All right, so maybe I didn't really receive any such honor. I've been told, though, I'd have a fighting chance. You see, not one, not two, but yes, three people recently informed me that I was the happiest bride they've ever seen. Did you get that? *Ever*. And we're talking friends who also watched the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton back in 2011.

But before I could draft my acceptance speech, complete with mock astonishment and thanks to all the "little people," this was thrown at me:

"I just figured you were happy in a delusional way."

Um . . . excuse me?

"After all, what person could be *that* happy if they *really* knew what they were getting themselves into?" this friend explained. "If they fully grasped how imperfect their soon-to-be spouse was."

Okay, valid point. Friend: 1. Me: 0.

I admit, in many ways I was a bride wearing blinders. When I put on that dress and walked down that aisle, I was a stranger to a lot of Ted's peculiar habits and sinful patterns. Our fourteen months from "Hello" to "I do" didn't inform me of his weird affinity for drinking soy sauce directly out of the bottle (all future house guests, beware), or that this man whom I'd termed a "walking dictionary" became surprisingly uncreative with his language when frustrated. Those things came later. If I'd have witnessed some of these glaring realities of post-newlywed life beforehand, perhaps I would have felt less optimistic that day.

Yet as I reflected on my friend's words, I couldn't help but wonder: Did my excitement boil down to simply delusion? Or was my happiness a reflection of something more?

- 14 Something basic. Something foundational. I started to think about the first marriage.

The First Team

I grew up a pastor's daughter. My kindergarten and early elementary school days were filled with memorizing the sermons my dad presented in Bible college and then seminary. I could recite them verbatim. Not because it was some weird requirement for me to do so, I guess I just heard them enough. Much to my embarrassment, my parents have old VHS tapes of me recapping Bible stories to the video camera and pleading for my imaginary viewers to care for the hungry children around the world. So Adam and Eve, yeah, they were old friends by the time I could spell c-a-t.

It wasn't until after this conversation with my friend, though, that I had an "aha!" moment. As I read through Genesis 1, 2, and 3, I noticed that this infamous duo wasn't just the first married couple we see in Scripture, they're also the first example of a human team. You know, more than one person coming together for a common purpose or goal.

And I say "human," because we clearly see teamwork at play among the Trinity. Genesis 1 tells us that God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). It was a team effort. It wasn't the Father telling the Son and the Holy Spirit, "Hey, watch what I can do with a little bit of dirt and some breath."

As I revisited these opening chapters, I saw that this original man and woman had all the markings of a good team.

1. They Were United

A rib wasn't the only thing Adam and Eve had in common. They also shared the same life goals which served to further unite them. Namely, having kids and taking good care

of the earth and its creatures. These were tasks given to them directly from God.

2. They Were Cooperative

When it came to these common goals, they worked together; they cooperated. And I'm not just referring to the "having kids" one here. I'm also talking about stewarding the earth. I highly doubt the pre-fall Adam just sat around all day watching the tigers play and let Eve tend all the trees on her own. Some theologians even theorize that he was standing right next to Eve when she took that forbidden bite. But since I'm no Bible scholar, I'll leave that detail for theologians to hash out.

3. They Were Committed

Adam and Eve were committed to each other and to the common goals they shared. Which I guess wasn't too difficult, seeing that they found themselves in a "what if you were stranded on a desert island with only one person" kind of scenario.

What's really impressive is that they did it all without bickering. Nope, not one single fight. At least not until after their brush with the serpent.

The advent of conflict didn't put an end to marriage as a team, though. Sin didn't change the fact that this couple was a God-created, God-ordained pair, even if that serpent hoped it would. It just became harder. *Unity* became more difficult. The new pain that now accompanied their tasks of bringing life from the earth and from the womb tempted them both toward discord. Cooperation toward *common goals* was interrupted by personal ambition. *Commitment* was threatened by passivity and selfishness.

With this "aha!" moment, I decided that there was something basic, something foundational, that had fueled my excitement and happiness on our wedding day. Something that

16 I don't believe even post-honeymoon realities could have crushed. Rather, it was something that could carry us through them.

It was the fact that on that December evening, in the dim glow of candlelight, I joined a new team. When I walked down that aisle, I was a "me." When Ted and I walked back up it, that "me" had become a part of "us"—Team Us, as I like to call this new formation.

It was one of the many reasons Ted and I decided to get married. Just as God declared in the garden that "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18), Ted and I agreed we'd be better together than we were apart. We believed that God could use the joining of our lives in a unique way for His glory.

Oh, I also fell in love with Ted's blue eyes, mischievous charm, and those melancholy piano nocturnes he often played. (I had to throw those in, you know, just in case you were under the impression that I approached marriage from a purely spiritual standpoint.)

Marriage as a Team

That's what this book is all about. It's about marriage together. Marriage as a team with both husband and wife working and playing toward a winning season. For Ted and me, this idea of team is foundational to our marriage, and I hope to yours too. If not, it's my goal that it will be by the time you finish reading.

In the coming chapters, I'll share with you how Ted's and my decision to adopt a team mentality has shaped our marriage. How it's helped us remain united as we've encountered things like annoying habits, different hobbies, conflict, job loss, and parenting.

Ideally, this book is meant to be read together as a couple, although not necessarily out loud. I realize that has the po-

tential to be a bit awkward. But in some manner, try to read it simultaneously. Maybe that means one of you reads a chapter on Tuesday and the other goes through it on Wednesday. Then on Thursday, you chat about it.

Now the reality is this won't work for every couple. Generally speaking, men don't pick up a book on marriage as eagerly as women do unless a small group study is involved. Ted and I are proof of that. He'd be more likely to read a short-list of a book's points online, while I'd devour all ten chapters in a week. Don't worry if you don't fit the "ideal." Figure out what works best for you as a couple. For example, even if you can't get your spouse to read this book, that doesn't mean the two of you can't delve into the discussion questions together. And when you do, you don't have to go through them word-by-word over coffee, you can simply talk about the ideas I share while you hike or take a road trip or do the dishes.

And just to show that Ted and I really do approach most everything as a team, you'll get a chance to hear from him in each chapter too. Watch for his "Ted Says" sections, where he offers thoughts and reflections on what I share.

My prayer is that once you finish this book, you'll be ready to get off the bench and get some skin in the game. That you'll echo the words of Audrey Hepburn when she said, "If I get married, I want to be very married."

CHAPTER ONE

*Grace like
Sweeping*

The greatest marriages are built on teamwork. A mutual respect, a healthy dose of admiration, and a never-ending portion of love and grace.

—FAWN WEAVER

I'M NOT BIG ON sports. Yeah, I know that seems a bit ironic coming from the author of a book called *Team Us*, but there you have it. The fact is, I'm fairly clueless when it comes to America's favorite athletic pastimes. Sure, I can name my current hometown's major league baseball team, the Braves, but if you start asking me about football teams, I'd need the help of Google.

Luckily for me, I married a man who isn't all that into sports either. Sometimes Ted wishes he were, but if given the choice he'd much rather watch a political analysis of the president's latest speech on Fox News than instant replays on ESPN. While some couples have power struggles over

20 whether to watch HGTV or Monday Night Football, our quibbles face off kitchen remodels against breaking news.

We aren't total killjoys in the realm of sports. We feel the electricity when Olympic season rolls around. I do pull out my "Go USA!" spirit for figure skating during the winter games. Ted finds the modern pentathlon in the summer games intriguing, largely because a friend of ours competed in recent years. Yet, if we miss watching them when they air, I can't say we're all that disappointed. Life goes on pretty much the same either way.

But something unexpected happened the last time the Winter Olympics made its way to our TV. We got hooked. As in DVR-recording, disappointment-when-we-missed-a-competition type hooked. It wasn't what you'd think, though. We weren't addicted to ice skating, freestyle skiing, or even bobsledding, but on curling. You know, that sport you'd expect to find on the decks of an ocean liner somewhere because it looks a lot like shuffleboard. Except, well, it's played on ice.

It happened one Saturday afternoon as I randomly flipped through the channels. I'm pretty sure I was looking for the pairs figure skating competition. I didn't find skating, but I did stumble upon a sport I'd never seen before. A game that included . . . wait, were those brooms? In the Olympics? Really?

I'm not sure why I kept watching, but I did. It wasn't like this sport was all that exciting at first glance. Honestly, it seemed to have the entertainment value of C-SPAN. For some reason, though, the longer I watched, the harder it was to stop. Soon Ted joined me. Before long, I'd even pulled up Wikipedia on our laptop to learn more about this broom-inclusive sport.

Nicknamed "chess on ice," curling requires strategy, precision, and excellent teamwork. If you don't know how the

game works, here are the basics from my research via Wikipedia (I also possibly spent a few hours perusing *Curling for Dummies online*¹).

A game of curling is made up of two teams with four members each. The players take turns skillfully sliding a granite stone across the ice, also known as the “curling sheet,” toward a large circular target called the “house.” The team to get the most stones in the house’s center or closest to it wins. As you’d expect from a game likened to chess, there are a number of complicated rules and plays. But as I said, basics.

What makes curling interesting is that it’s not like bowling. It isn’t a game where once you’ve done your best to calculate your ball’s trajectory and sent it off, it’s gone. You know, the kind where if it starts to veer for the gutter, you’re out of luck. Nope, curling has this wonderful thing called “sweepers.” After the stone is slid, two team members, or “sweepers,” skate alongside it, using the sweeping motion of their brooms to make sure the “rock,” as we North Americans like to call it, doesn’t deviate from its set path.

I’m telling you, if you’ve never watched a game of curling, it really is fascinating once you understand all the strategy that’s at play. Search for it on YouTube. You’ll thank me.

What makes it even more intriguing for me, though, is it reminds me of marriage. You see, just like curling, marriage is a team effort that can thrive when approached with strategy, intentionality, and lots of sweeping. At least I’ve found this to be true in my own marriage.

The War Room Picnic

I still remember one of Ted’s and my first real dates, although I admit being a mom of young children has blurred the details a bit. Like, did we eat Reubens on our May picnic? Or perhaps it was turkey and cheese? I can bet that Ted

- 22 doesn't remember either. If it happened more than five years ago and wasn't life-changing, he tends to forget.

TED SAYS

I imagine some wives would find such a memory-loss quirk maddening. Ashleigh has come to see it as part of who I am, though. It's something that's at times a disappointment (when I forget her birthday) and at times a blessing (when I forget an argument). Accepting my imperfect memory helps us avoid conflict in those times when my forgetfulness is untimely.

Regardless of whether our bread was rye or wheat, what I do know is that we didn't just bring lunch to the park that day. We also packed a few pieces of scrap paper and two pens. While some couples may have used that beautiful spring afternoon to gaze adoringly into each other's eyes, as they ever-so-discreetly checked their teeth for stray food, we decided to make a list. Sure, it sounds boring—well, maybe not to all you fellow Type-A personalities out there—but looking back, it was perhaps one of the wisest ways we could kick off our relationship.

You see, this wasn't a bucket list of our must-dos. We weren't scribbling down things like "Take a walk in the botanical gardens" and "Eat crème brulee in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower," although we did go on to do both. Nope, we were strategizing. The picnic table that day became our war room.

We jotted down a list of qualities we wanted to see characterize our relationship. At that point in time, we didn't know whether we'd go on to marry each other, but what we did know was that regardless of the result, we wanted to look

back at our time together and know we did our best to walk out our relationship in a way that honored God and each other.

We scribbled things like friendship, purity, and good communication. It may sound like we were writing a prescription for our relationship or dictating a set of rules, but we weren't. What we were doing was creating a map of the way we wanted to see our interactions develop and play out. We'd both been in previous dating relationships; Ted had even been engaged twice. We'd learned a lot from our mistakes, and neither of us was eager to repeat them.

I think it's safe to say that every team, whether it's in curling or marriage, does better with strategy and intentionality. They take a team far. Yet these things alone don't bring home the gold. Ted and I have found that sweeping is crucial.

Sweeping Matters

While strategy and intentionality set our marriage on a good path, they aren't what's kept us going when we've struggled with each other's selfish habits. Or when we've faced conflict. They're not what's brought us through job loss and a miscarriage and different parenting styles.

Nope, it's been grace.

Grace is to marriage what sweepers are to curling (I know, I sound a bit like the Sphinx from the 1999 film *Mystery Men*). Just like the two sweepers' primary job is to ensure the rock follows its projected trajectory as closely as possible, grace helps marriage stay on that heavenward "until death do us part" course.

I'm sure you're familiar with the term *grace*. It's one we throw around fairly often and sometimes rather casually in our Christian circles. It's the name of our churches, the short prayers we utter before meals, and, for me, the middle name of our oldest daughter. I think many of us, including me at

24 times, have come to view grace in the context of our spiritual lives, as we do cheddar cheese to a cheeseburger: necessary, but not as exciting as a good slice of Gruyère. It's much more interesting to focus on what God's calling is on our lives or our top three spiritual gifts.

While there's nothing wrong with concerning ourselves with these things, it's important not to brush over grace. This "disposition to or an act or instance of kindness, courtesy, or clemency"² is foundational to our salvation. Therefore, I think it should be foundational to our marriages.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

I love that passage. It reminds me that God's grace is free. It's a gift. It's not dependent on how many hours I volunteered at hospice while in high school or how consistently I show up on Sunday mornings. Yes, I certainly want to honor God with my attitudes and actions, just as Ted and I wanted to in our dating relationship, but I don't have to bring home first place in the category of good works in order to snag this prize.

When I grasp this truth that God's grace—His kindness and clemency—has been given to me, it should make a big difference in my relationships with others, specifically with Ted. And it has. While I don't think we wrote grace down on our list that day at the park, somewhere along the way we determined it was important. We decided that we wouldn't withhold it from one another or force the other to earn it. We'd give it freely to each other, just as we'd received it from the Lord.

Does our practice of grace mean that anything goes in our marriage? Do we just turn a blind eye to each other's

sins? Not at all. Although, as I'll mention later, it has taken some growth on my part to directly address it.

But when Ted and I do address it, especially the small stuff, we also embrace the wisdom of 1 Peter that says, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). We attempt to do what R. C. Sproul Jr. points to as the core meaning of this verse. We "under-accuse, over-repent and over-forgive."³ We're not afraid to call sin by its name, but we're also quick "to forgive it and to look past it."⁴

TED SAYS

I love how Dr. Sproul Jr. explores this verse: "When we are wronged, our calling is to practice a careful moral calculus. Is this offense one I should let go of?" he asks. "Or is this offense grievous enough that love means confronting in grace my brother?"⁵ Ashleigh and I have found that most of our "sins" toward each other fit in that first, love-covering category. And it's good that we just let them go.

I'm reminded of what nineteenth-century theologian Charles Spurgeon once said:

He who grows in grace remembers that he is but dust, and he therefore does not expect his fellow Christians to be anything more. He overlooks ten thousand of their faults, because he knows his God overlooks twenty thousand in his own case. He does not expect perfection in the creature, and, therefore, he is not disappointed when he does not find it.⁶

The reality is that deciding and doing aren't the same thing. Just because Ted and I determined to extend grace doesn't make it easy. Sometimes we'd much rather pick a fight with each other than extend kindness. Sometimes that's

26 exactly what we do. Neither one of us is naturally inclined to respond to everything with grace, especially when it falls into the category of irritating or just plain maddening. That doesn't mean we stop trying, though.

The Game Plan

So what's been Ted's and my game plan for living out grace in the minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour of daily life? Especially on those days when picking a fight takes a lot less effort?

As you'll read throughout this book, there are lots of ways we've put grace to work in our marriage. Believe me, we don't just let it lie around. There's one thing, though, that serves as a starting point for everything else. And that is our determination to focus on the best, not the worst, in each other.

Think back to those Olympic curling teams. Yep, they're masters at strategy, precision, and sweeping. They have to be to make it to "the Games." But something else influences how well they execute a game, and that's team unity. When they step out on that ice, they need to work together.

Whether it's in curling or marriage, unity flourishes when members of a team focus on and play to each other's strengths, not weaknesses. Our friends George and Julie have found this to be true in their marriage. George shared:

I'm a clean freak. Julie's . . . well, *not* a clean freak. She won't be starring on Hoarders any time soon, but she just doesn't see a problem with piles of papers on her desk and a little clutter in the living room. That stuff drives me nuts; so a number of our first fights were about messiness. Even now, I get dirty looks when I suggest relocating piles of papers to the recycle bin.

In our initial years of wedded bliss, here's how the fight usually went. I'd get stressed about other things (like work), so my patience would get shorter than usual. (And to be honest, patience is not one of my selling points on a good day.) I'd notice a fresh stack of debris in the house, and make a few delicate, subtle suggestions about what to do with it (or maybe where to shove it). Julie would roll her eyes, then say she'd deal with it "tomorrow."

A few days later, when the pile was still there and I was stressed again, I'd get on her case for not keeping her promise about "tomorrow." Julie's eyes would narrow as she reminded me how busy she was with grad school. My tone would turn sarcastic as I reminded *her* that she'd watched three episodes of reality TV last night. Before you knew it, the cheerful sounds of shouting and door-slamming would ring through the household.

Slowly, I think we both realized that fighting over messes was . . . how should I put it? . . . *really stupid*. Messes still drive me nuts, and Julie still makes 'em, but when she leaves a pile of clothes on her side of the bed, I try to look the other way. She has plenty of good qualities (like loving me, for instance) that make up for dirty laundry. If she misses her self-imposed deadline to clean things up, I try to remind myself she had good intentions, even when the follow-through is lacking.

When I gripe about a debris pile, she does her best to remember that although I'm an irritating neat freak, there are a couple reasons why she agreed to marry me anyway. So she'll often put in some time on the cleanup, even if the mess never attains my standards of antiseptis.

We still have “discussions” over messes, but blowups have become rare. Most of the time, we get through it with a few rolled eyes and a little understanding. There are enough good things in our marriage that I can deal with a stack of random CDs heaped in the living room—even the one I’m staring at as I type this paragraph on my laptop. Julie’s a talented worship musician, and talented musicians need lots of CDs. I’ll try to remember that later today when I drop subtle hints for her to sort them onto shelves . . .

Poised for the Best

For Ted and me, focusing on the positive doesn’t just include keeping the other’s strengths front and center. I doubt it stops there for George and Julie either. It means that we also choose to assume the best of the other’s motives and actions.

This idea of assuming the best comes from 1 Corinthians 13, that famous New Testament chapter on love. Odds are, you had it read at your wedding. In this passage, the Amplified Bible says that love “is ever ready to believe the best of every person” (1 Corinthians 13:7). Did you get that? “Ever ready,” as in always poised.

This section of Scripture is more than just nice prose read during one’s nuptials. I’ve found that when it comes to extinguishing “fires” set off by things like knee-jerk reactions, there’s nothing like it. Ted and I keep it handy for such occasions.

Okay, maybe I should clarify that a bit: I’m mostly the one who keeps it handy. You see, while grace may not come naturally to either Ted or me 24/7, when it’s time to assume the best, Ted seems to make it look effortless.

I'd love to claim it's because I make it a cinch for him. That I'm like Mary Poppins: "practically perfect in every way." Let's all get a good laugh out of that now because it couldn't be more untrue. It just seems to be part of Ted's last-born, easy-going personality. He doesn't read too much into what others say. He tends to take them at face-value and is quick to offer the benefit of the doubt. It's a beauty he's brought to our marriage.

TED SAYS

This is a good time to reread the Spurgeon quote from a few pages back. As "sinners," both Ashleigh and I have kind of come to expect imperfection from each other. Yeah, that's romantic. The thing is, we consequently expect that we'll need to extend grace in response to the other's imperfection. And we've come to appreciate that we're more than likely to receive it as well.

I've had to work harder, especially when we first started out. My default was to jump to conclusions, and not positive ones at that. Over a decade later, I'm still learning from an early opportunity I had to assume the best of Ted.

Remember that war room meeting in the park? About two months later, Ted and I found that item #3 on our list, that would be "good communication," wasn't going to be as easy to accomplish as we'd first assumed.

It all started when Ted disappeared. Yep, for about three days.

Okay, so he didn't actually disappear, as in his location was a mystery. I knew exactly where he was, he just wasn't available. At least not to me. Instead of us taking random walks through the woods or eating dinner at our favorite Mexican dive, he was holed up in his home studio making

30 last-minute edits to a CD our church was producing. Not only had he lent his synth and piano playing skills to the project, but he also served as one of the engineers. It was down to the wire, and Ted had taken vacation time off to make the final tweaks.

The problem was, I think he forgot he owned a car or a phone or an email account during that time. If he remembered he had them, he certainly wasn't using them to get in touch with me.

What was I left to think? Well, there were two options. One, I could assume that Ted was intensely focused on finishing this project and not purposely ignoring me. Two, I could take it personally.

Being the mature woman that I was, I took it personally. I started to wonder if maybe Ted had forgotten he had a girlfriend and perhaps even come to prefer his life minus me.

By day three, I'd had enough.

"Fine, he won't return my calls," I thought. "I'll just show up at his condo." So I did. At that point, even my dislike for conflict—which you'll learn more about later—couldn't keep me from his doorstep.

Do you know what happened? He was happy to see me. I was relieved but surprised all the same.

After all, I'd jumped to all kinds of conclusions. I'd assumed that he was reevaluating our relationship. I'd told myself that maybe he'd decided he really didn't like me all that much. Turns out none of those things were true. As I'd come to learn better over the years, when Ted is working on a project, he immerses himself in it, giving it 100 percent of his attention. He's not one to multitask well.

A walk around the block did a lot to clear this up. I went home that evening realizing the importance of not jumping to conclusions. Ted came to see that no matter how focused he was, it's never a good idea to give me three days of silence. We were one step closer to making good on item #3 on our list.

If curling has taught me anything, it's this. One, J. K. Rowling wasn't the first person to invent a sport that uses brooms. Two, and far more importantly, being a team takes work. Whether it's on the ice or in marriage, teamwork requires strategy, intentionality, sweeping, and unity. It's not always easy to stay on that heavenward, "till death do us part" trajectory. The thing is, not only is it doable, it's worth the effort.

Us Time

Now it's your turn. Grab these questions, find a spot where you and your spouse love to chat, and create your own war room.

1. If you were to compare marriage to any sport, what would it be and why? Share with each other your own sports analogies and insights. Be silly but also find a moment to think seriously about this.
2. What are two or three ways you're intentional in your marriage? Whether it's setting aside time to talk about your day or scheduling a weekly date night, affirm a few specific things that you do well. Now brainstorm a few ways you can do better.
3. What does grace look like in your marriage? How do you practice it? Discuss a time this week when you could have offered grace, but didn't. What is a specific way you can do better next time?
4. Like George, is there something trivial that you let disrupt unity in your marriage? Discuss a recent "blowup" and how it could have been avoided.
5. Are you poised to assume the best of each other? What types of situations result in knee-jerk reactions from you? What can you do to change this?