



YOUR BEST

tedlowe

**MARRIAGE** IS **EASIER**  
THAN YOU THINK

# Dedication

## **To Doug and Cathy Fields**

From the first moment Nancie and I became an US, we have had the privilege of having you in our lives. In a world that paints marriage as an old ball and chain, you two make marriage look oh so good. Your transparency, intention, affection, and laughter are contagious.

Thanks for all the vacations, long lingering meals, and taking our calls when we have yet another “how-to-do-family” emergency.

You two are generous in every sense of the word and have blessed our marriage and family in ways we will not fully understand until heaven. It’s with much love, laughter, and gratitude, I dedicate the hope of this book to the two of you.

# Acknowledgments

## **To Nancie Lee “Púg” Hoblitzell Lowe**

For the way you are wired, words seem silly in this context, especially since I know you aren't a words girl. So in acknowledgment for your help with this book, I here by solemnly swear to serve you in the way you love to be loved, acts of service. So for one solid year I promise to not lay one piece of clothing on the gold chair in our bedroom. Oh baby, do I know you or do I know you? Now because I'm a words guy, I have to say to you, my Púg, that you are my favorite forever and always. You grow more beautiful by the day. You are my baby-mama. You make me laugh more than anyone on the planet. You are the best one, the only one. I love our US.

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## **To my children, who are growing into fine young men and women: Chapman, Judson, and Teddie**

You bring meaning to everything, including this book. You make my life full of everything, except money. When do I love you? All the time.

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## **To Tim Walker**

This book without you would be a hot mess and still in my computer saved in six different versions. You rescued this book from my laptop. You not only organized my words, you helped me find them, trust them, and think about them in a way I could have never done without you. Your heart, head, and friendship are all over this book. I am forever grateful.

### **To Reggie Joiner**

Since 2001, at North Point and at Orange, you have been the one who has made it possible for me to be able to solely focus on marriages. Some days I thank you for that, some days I want to hit you for that. Your hard work makes it possible for me to do mine. Much love and thanks to you.

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Mike and Tiffany Conyers, Mike Jeffries, Scott Kedersha, John McGee, Payden Montgomery, Michael and Shamika Owens, Afton and Hudson Phillips, Stephanie and Tom Robison, Stephanie and Ryan Porter, Kenny and Elle Campbell, Evan Chasteen, and Courtney Thomas

# Endorsements

"I've read a lot of marriage books and I LOVE this book. Here's how I can tell this is a great read on marriage: I have marked up every page. I believe in Ted's message. The 'Core 4 Habits' to a great marriage are practical, life-changing, affirming, and they make sense. I know Ted and Nancie, and what I appreciate most is their absolute authenticity, passion for healthy marriage, and their fun-loving attitude. Do not pass up an opportunity to read this book."

**Jim Burns, President of HomeWord and author of *Creating an Intimate Marriage, Closer*, and co-author of *Getting Ready for Marriage***

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"As both a leader and an author, Ted Lowe has a priceless skill: he takes something important and very meaningful and purposefully makes it FUN. That's how he approaches this book—and that's how he suggests you approach your marriage! This book is packed with game-changing and very practical advice that you will immensely enjoy to help you create a marriage that you will immensely enjoy!"

**Shaunti Feldhahn, social researcher and bestselling author of *For Women Only and For Men Only***

“One of my favorite things about Ted Lowe is his commitment to helping couples do everything they can, proactively, to avoid crises or divorce. Sometimes challenges are outside of our control, but most of the time there are habits we can develop and decisions we can make to build our marriage upon a solid foundation. In *Your Best Us*, Ted helps couples develop strong habits to set them up for long-term success. *Your Best Us* is a great read for pre-marrieds, newly marrieds, or any couple who wants to grow their relationship!”

**Scott Kedersha, Director of Premarital and Newly Married Ministry at  
Watermark Church, [scottkedersha.com](http://scottkedersha.com)**

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“If you are looking for the road map to experience your happily ever after, look no further. This is the go to handbook for any couple looking for a clear cut strategy on best practices for their marriage, backed by research and founded on the timeless truths found in scripture. With practical ideas that you can plug and play in your marriage, you are sure to not only experience deeper connection, but inspire your sense of fun too!”

**Casey Caston, co-founder of [Marriage365.org](http://Marriage365.org) and co-author of  
*Naked Dinners and Communication that Connects***

Your Best Us

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# CHAPTER

## Our US



Every US is unique. Every US has a story. Every US has a beginning to their story. This is ours.

I have a picture on my desk of my wife and me when we first met. If I had to use one word to describe us at that point, it wouldn't be . . .

Cute.

Young.

Fun.

Energetic.

Hopeful.

Optimistic.

Happy.

It would be . . .

**Stupid.**

## YOUR BEST US

Yes, when we met, apparently we lost our minds.

Our US began at a large church at a student conference called “Pack Your Bags, Jesus Is Coming.” Sounds romantic, right? I was a youth pastor and had taken my youth group to the conference. The speaker told everyone they had better get ready because the rapture could happen at any moment. Every kid in my youth group was terrified they were going to get left behind. (Some of them would have been.)

While I should have been comforting them, I wasn’t, because I was focused on just one person out of the 800 in attendance—Nancie Hoblitzell. When I saw her, I thought, “What in the world is she doing here?” I knew of her from college because we ran in the same social circles, even though we had never talked. I was surprised to see her because . . . well, let’s just say that she, like me, was not hanging out at the campus ministry clubhouse.

She was the president of her sorority and seemed to be everywhere on campus. She was pretty and loud, and in Southern sorority girl tradition, often wore a big bow in her hair. And she was always surrounded by a bunch of other loud, pretty girls with big bows in their hair. But make no mistake about it, she was queen of the bow-heads. While I was in a fraternity that socialized with her sorority, she was so out of my league. I never dreamed of talking to her.

But there we were, three years after we both had graduated, at this conference, and I’m thinking maybe I can talk to her. During those three years, my faith had become more solid, and since she was there, I was thinking that maybe hers had too. I was thinking maybe, just maybe, God could intervene on my behalf to help me finally get the nerve to speak to Nancie Hoblitzell. I spent the conference staring at her, plotting how I could bump into her in the hall.

A friend sitting next to me said, “What do you keep looking at?”

I said, “It’s not what, but who.”

I pointed her out, and he said, “I know her.”

I said, “You are a liar.”

He said, “I swear I know her. Her name is Nancie Hoblitzell.

## OUR US

Her brother and I were good friends in high school.”

I said, “We have to bump into her in the hall.”

So we did and he introduced us. I could tell after talking with her for just a few minutes that her life had changed like mine. I got her number, and I asked her out. (That was back in the day when you got numbers and asked people out.) And by nothing short of divine intervention, she said yes.

Because I didn’t want to mess things up, I took her to a really expensive restaurant. But when we got to Applebee’s there was a 45-minute wait.

Nancie said, “No big deal, I don’t mind waiting.” But the seats in the lobby were full.

She said, “Let’s just sit outside.” We went outside, but the benches were full there as well.

She said, “No worries, let’s just sit on the curb.”

The curb? I’m thinking, “Now this is a low-maintenance woman!”

So we sat on the curb, and just like that our date was off to the races. Within 15 minutes, I started doing the relational math.

Hotness + loving Jesus—no, I mean— loving Jesus + hotness  
÷ the square root of sitting on the curb × smart + funny =  
*Wow, she might be the one.*

We stayed up that night talking until 3:00 in the morning. The next day, she was all I could think about. Nancie Hoblitzell, except for her hard-to-pronounce/remember last name, was perfect. But there was just one problem: We both lived in Alabama, and I was moving to California in just two months.

But here’s the great news: She was as crazy as I was. We kept dating and acting as if I weren’t moving. But as the day of my move drew closer, we started asking ourselves, what are we going to do?

Our answer: Make a lifelong decision way too soon.

## YOUR BEST US

About a week before I was supposed to leave for California, I said to her, “I know you want to teach at a junior college, and I just happen to know that there are several junior colleges where I am moving.”

She said in her oh-so-cute, perfect way, “I’m not moving to California to be your girlfriend.”

And I said in my oh-so-cute, perfect way, “Then why don’t you move to California to be my wife?” Boom.

So we decided to get married, to become an US. Of course we didn’t share this with anyone, because it made no sense. So I moved to California. We bought many plane tickets on our credit cards to see each other, and got married exactly one year from our first date.

And there we were, newlyweds in our early 20s, living in beautiful, sunny Southern California, enjoying our great, low-paying jobs, surrounded by amazing people. Everything should have been perfect, right? It wasn’t—at least not all the time.

We thought we were going to be different from other married couples. And by different, I mean great. We thought we had something special that the rest of the married population appeared not to have.

We weren’t going to fight.

Our love would always find a better way.

This bliss we were experiencing would never end.

Our US was going to be beautiful in every way, unique in every way, every single moment of every single day.

Our marriage was unique, but our struggles were common. We weren’t a train wreck, but on some days we got close. And on other days, we were stinking adorable. We enjoyed each other so much.

We were what we now describe as average, with moments of awesome and moments of awful.

## OUR US

And it was no wonder we had moments of awesome. We had quickly but unintentionally created some great marital habits:

We were both strong in our faith.

We were still silly and fun with each other.

We made time for each other.

We had sex often.

We surrounded ourselves with great people.

We both cared how we treated each other.

We spent time with another couple who modeled what it meant to have a great marriage.

These habits led us to have moments of awesome. These moments made us feel connected, in love, and in like with each other.

But we had also quickly but unintentionally created some bad marital habits that led to moments of awful. At lightning speed, we could go from feeling very connected to very disconnected. I remember thinking how crazy it was that it only took one wrong look, minor disagreement, or unmet expectation to ruin an otherwise perfectly great day. While our moments of awesome were varied in size and shape, our moments of awful had become a script we acted out over and over.

It went a little something like this: I would say something the wrong way. She would shut down. I would relentlessly try to get her to tell me what was wrong. She would finally tell me. I would then clarify in painstaking detail how she had heard me the “wrong” way.

This was our connection-killing habit, regardless of how trivial the topic. We would get amped up over petty things like what time we needed to leave, feeding the dog, taking out the trash, speaking words with a certain tone, being too quiet, being too loud, spending time with our friends, not spending time with our friends, buying this, not buying this, saying that, not saying that . . . the options were endless, but the ugly dance was basically the same.

Like our moments of awesome, it was no wonder we had moments of awful. We were very different people with different backgrounds.

## YOUR BEST US

Growing up, Nancie moved often due to her dad's job as a coach. My dad is a fifth-generation farmer who wasn't moving us anywhere. She had a stay-at-home mom. My mom died when I was 10. On top of that, our personalities were and are very different. We have different views on money. She has the brain of an accountant. I have a brain floating in a sea of ADHD. She is very scheduled. I am very spontaneous. So in our first few years of marriage, our differences were like relational bumper cars; some days the bumps were fun and giddy, other days they hurt.

But then our US took an unexpected twist.

Amazingly, and giving no credit to our US, we were working at one of the largest churches in the country, Saddleback Community Church, where Rick Warren is the pastor. If you haven't heard of Rick Warren, he is like the Elvis of pastors, and Saddleback Church is Graceland. I will save you the very long story of how this happened, but through a crazy turn of events, we started performing sketches and skits in the weekend worship services.

To help him make a point in his messages, Pastor Rick asked us to act out 6–10-minute scenes of a married couple experiencing the different tensions or situations he was addressing in his sermon series.

After the services, people often told us they had the exact same experiences in their own marriages. One couple even accused us and the church of spying on them. (They weren't kidding.) Married couples passionately wanted us to know that they related to what they had just seen us play out on stage. These scenes resonated so much with people that we quickly became regulars at the weekend services as well as at the marriage events at our church.

The next thing we knew, it was five years and one baby later, and we were traveling all over the country acting at different marriage and youth events. But our moments of awesome were starting to be overshadowed by our moments of awful.

## OUR US

As we were performing at one event, I noticed that our faces were on hundreds of screens throughout the arena. We were in front of 18,000 people, and I got a little puffed up with pride. After the performance, we were walking down the stage stairs while people were still clapping, and I said, “Wow, that was incredible.” Nancie said, “I just want to get home to the baby.” Why? Because just moments prior to that performance we had been fighting in the green room. It appeared that not even arena events could trump the effects of our increasing moments of awful.

But as we traveled, there was still something in me that knew our marriage could be better. I somehow knew not to settle. I became increasingly sure God didn’t want us to settle either. I felt more compelled every day to figure this marriage thing out—not just for us, but also for other couples who were experiencing the same things. So I started listening to the marriage experts who surrounded us at these events. I was reading every marriage book I could get my hands on. I asked successful married couples how they did it. I became a student of marriage. I started to secretly and not so secretly implement some of my findings in our own marriage. Some of these simple changes were working. Moments of awesome in our US increased. Moments of awful in our US decreased.

I didn’t want to keep this hope to myself. Just as our scenes of tension had resonated with people, I wanted to provide answers that empowered people. I wanted to help couples start to experience what we were finally experiencing. While there were many good ways to do that, for me, I felt the church was the best place to start.

So after many prayers and conversations with Nancie, I was compelled to figure out ways to help marriages through the local church. I wanted to create avenues for the local church to help marriages in a way that would resonate with women AND men. I wanted to give couples bite-size wins for their marriage instead of dumping five years’ worth of content on them in two days. I wanted to do it in a way that resonated with every marriage regardless of their faith. And I wanted it to be fun. So I dreamed and wrote and had conversations and researched, and I felt in my gut that this was what I was created to do.



## YOUR BEST US

As we continued to travel, I met another very influential pastor of a large church—Andy Stanley, pastor of North Point Community Church in Alpharetta, Georgia. I shared with him my heart’s desire to help married couples. He introduced me to the family pastor at North Point, Reggie Joiner. I shared with Reggie the same thing I had shared with Andy. Several interviews later, I was offered the job as the Director of Married Life at North Point Church. (*Record screech*)

What? We had been married six years at the time they hired me. And while we had found some hope, we were still experiencing some moments of awful. I’m not sure who was crazier—them for hiring me, or me for saying yes. Yet, I had a sense of peace (most days) and an even bigger sense of excitement (some days).

I led a team that was given the rare gift in ministry to create something that hadn’t been done before. And I knew I wanted to create something not only for couples who were stuck or on the verge of divorce, but also for the countless numbers of couples like us experiencing varying moments of awesome and awful.

One of the first things we created at our church were quarterly one-night events for married couples. We worked very hard to make the events proactive, appealing to both men and women, fun, and—following Andy Stanley’s message model<sup>1</sup>—we wanted couples to walk away with just one, doable thing that could make their marriage better. In preparation for each quarter, I would dive into a passage from the Bible that was relevant to marriage. I would study it to death, and out of that time something powerful would emerge: one simple truth with one powerful action. Here’s the crazy part: Secular research also backed up these biblical principles and applications, so these truths were relevant to every person in the room.

Putting these truths into action worked not only in our own marriage but also in the marriages of the people at our church. We heard story after story of couples who were applying these simple applications to complex issues. They were experiencing wins in their marriages like never before. To the events we added small group experiences focused

## OUR US

on marriage and date nights for couples to do on their own. So many married people were having more and more moments of awesome and fewer and fewer moments of awful. I was Director of MarriedLife for nine years before starting MarriedPeople<sup>2</sup>, an organization with the mission to help churches help marriages. Every year we help thousands of churches teach what you are going to learn in this book.

So since 2001, my job has been to help married couples—in the real world—have a great marriage. And in the middle of pouring into other marriages all these years, I think our US has benefited the most. Nancie and I are two very stubborn, opinionated, different people. We have three kids we adore but who also serve up their own daily doses of awesome and awful. We have experienced great tragedy in our years together. But in the middle of it, we have a great marriage—not because we are perfect, but because we have applied what you are about to discover in this book.

That is why I finally decided after all these years to write this book. Because so many marriages, mine included, have practiced these easy-to-understand principles and applications, and they work.

So often in the name of helping married couples, experts with great intentions paint a picture of the perfect couple that no one can live up to. This book isn't that. This book is designed to help you become your best US.

Because there are things you like to do, places you like to go, and histories that are your own. And whether you are loving your US, wondering if your US is going to make it, or somewhere in-between, we all, at some level, want to become our best US.

And here's the great news, while the way we are wired both individually and as a couple may be different . . .  
While our stage of life might be different . . .  
While our situations may be different . . .

We all,  
at some  
level, want  
to become  
our best US.

## YOUR BEST US

There are some great marital habits that empower all of us—specifically four core habits (that come from the Bible) that can help every couple become their best US.

You can do what you are about to read even while living in the real world. So get ready, because your US isn't going to know what hit it . . . in a good way.

# 4 WAYS TO **INCREASE** YOUR **MOMENTS OF AWESOME** & **DECREASE** YOUR **MOMENTS OF AWFUL** IN YOUR MARRIAGE

## How's your **US**?

You are and your spouse are unique. There has never been another US just like the two of you. You may be thinking . . . ahhh we are like a marital snowflake, how romantic. Or maybe you're thinking... thank God there is not another couple like US because we are a hot mess!

No matter where you currently find your US, you can experience more moments of awesome and less moments of awful. And it's easier than you think. Your US can become more. Not some cookie cutter, clone version of someone else's marriage, but the best version of your US.

Through humor, transparency, biblical wisdom, research, and a massive amount of practicality, Ted Lowe guides you through four, doable, easy to understand habits that will help you become . . .

## YOUR BEST **US**



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He lives in Cumming, Georgia, with his four favorite people: his wife, Nancie, and their three children. Ted is co-author of *Married People: How Your Church Can Build Marriages that Last*.

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