

Mini Marriage Manual

Be encouraged and keep moving forward.



Day #1 Marriage Bumpers

Remember the bumpers in the bowling lanes when you were little? The new ones are cool but remember the old school bumpers, the long black corrugated tubes that the lane attendant would drag out from the back? Those were awesome. Bumper lanes are awesome because it didn't matter how you threw the ball because it always hit the mark. No skill required. No experience necessary. You couldn't even intentionally throw the ball outside of the bumpers, no matter what, the bumpers always force the ball back into the lane. Awesome right?

When I have the privilege of officiating weddings I always take the opportunity to meet with the young couples to talk about what I like to call, "*Things you'll eventually argue about anyway.*" While I'm not a big

bowler (with the exception of my family's Thanksgiving tradition) somewhere along the line I picked up a bowling analogy for successful marriages.

I tell couples that they need to develop marriage bumpers into their lives. Inevitably, couples will argue. Sometimes husbands and wives fight, they disagree, they don't see eye to eye and sometimes it's good for the husband to get out of the house to spend some time with some buddies or for the wife to get away to just be with "the girls". Of course there are rare occasions when couples never argue, never disagree, and never need a few minutes in their respective corners. However for the average couple, you may find yourself needing some time to just debrief.

Here's where the bumpers come in. Much like the bumpers in a bowling lane, the bumpers in real life need to allow us to bump up against them but then push us back to the middle of the lane. Too often we surround ourselves with people that do not value our marriage. These people are easily identifiable when you hear comments like:

- You don't need to put up with that, you should leave him.
- She's so controlling, she doesn't get you.
- You need to forget about them, let's go out and have some real fun.

When you surround yourself with people that do not value the sanctity of marriage, you will find it all the more difficult to return home to that marriage. What we need instead are people that will allow us to "bump" up against them but will then force us back home. People that will listen to your frustrations but then tell you to go back. Finding people who value traditional marriage is tough to begin with, finding people who value your traditional marriage may be even tougher. Who's your bumper?

Couple Discussion Questions:

1. Who are those other couples who could potentially serve as our marriage bumpers?
2. Who are those other men (for the husbands) and women (for the wife) who could serve as marriage bumpers?
3. Who is in our social circle currently that clearly doesn't value our marriage?
4. What are we feeling led to do in response to this fact?



Day #2 Stunned by an Inside Job

One of the many joys of being in ministry is the opportunity to officiate the weddings of those that I have grown close to over the years. I have officiated many family member's and former student's weddings over the years. I am reminded of Mike and Jessica's wedding a few years ago. Mike and Jessica's young love reminds me of a couple of things:

1. I am getting old.

No comments necessary on that point.

2. Marriage is delicate and needs to be protected.

As I reflect back on my wife and I's journey over the last almost 18 years I can clearly see the stages of our development as a couple. There was of course the "Honeymoon" stage that everyone knows about.

There's no arguing, no tension, everything is always perfect. As a new husband or new wife you can do no wrong during this first blissful stage. But here's a question that I've been thinking about recently, "What changes?" Why does the honeymoon stage eventually disappear? Why don't young married couples who constantly seek to out serve one another turn into old married couples that constantly seek to out serve one another? Here's the answer that you're not going to like if I just described your marriage: Selfishness. By nature we are selfish people. We want what we want when we want it. We want to spend money how we want. We want to go where we want, when we want to go. We want to spend our limited free time doing the things that make us happy.

Mark 10:6-9 says, *“But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

I've always loved the end of that verse, it's common for that last little phrase, *"What God has joined together, let no one separate"* to be used in weddings just after the new couple is pronounced husband and wife. But here's a thought, with all of the emphasis on keeping marriage free from the outside attack of extra-marital affairs, office romances, old high

school flames and the like, what about the possibility of an "*inside job*". What if we were slowly becoming unaware that our marriages were falling apart, not as a result of an outside force, but because of our own selfishness?

Couple Discussion Questions:

1. What would it look like to continue to keep the needs of your spouse as the number one priority of your marriage?
2. What would it look like for you and your spouse to repeat your wedding vows to one another at the start of everyday?
3. What if the "honeymoon stage" wasn't defined by a time span?
4. What if you both committed to loving and forgiving as Christ has chosen to love and forgive each of you as individuals?