

## Every Marriage Thriving

You've probably read the discouraging headlines: "Marriages within the church are breaking up at the same rate as those in society as a whole." We've all heard the statistics, and some of us have even experienced the devastation of a broken marriage first hand.

But is this the way it has to be?

At Elevation, we've asked ourselves a tough question: What would it take to see one hundred percent of our marriages stand the test of time? The answer is that it would take a lot. So, without hesitation, we're off and running in pursuit of this lofty goal.

But just so you understand, this isn't just a quantitative goal – it's a qualitative one. This isn't about seeing marriages just barely surviving – we want to see them thriving.

What follows is an explanation of our attempt to create an environment in our church community in which every husband and every wife lives out of the depths of the sacred relationship of marriage...

### The 'M' Word

As soon as a dating couple starts talking about marriage in their relationship, we want to hear about it! The best support we can offer a young couple is to walk with them through the early, formative stages of their relationship, before they cross the proverbial commitment line. We see our community of faith playing a valuable role in this decision-making process.

By sitting down in a confidential setting with a married couple from the church, the couple will find a safe environment to ask themselves some valuable questions about their relationship. They will be given the tools to determine whether or not this relationship is one that is ready to go to the next level of commitment, and will enjoy the support of those experienced in the field of marriage who will serve as guides along the exciting journey ahead.

### Marriage Prep

When a couple announces their engagement, there are plenty of things that start piling up on the to-do list. One item that we want to see on that list right off the bat is a series of marriage preparation sessions with the pastor or another designated married couple from the church.

This is an important part of preparing for the big day – far more so, in fact, than choosing the right flowers! For couples being married by a pastor of our church, these sessions are mandatory, reflecting the significance we see in asking the right questions in the months leading up to the wedding day.

### **Aftershocks**

Lest anyone think that a public exchange of vows guarantees a happy marriage, we want to see couples make it a priority to sit down with their pre-marriage counselor (or equivalent) in a post-wedding setting. The married life brings with it significant changes, and it's important to have people with whom you can talk openly about making the necessary adjustments.

For couples being married by a pastor of the church, these sessions are mandatory, and will take place 6-months and 12-months after the wedding day. By committing to this ahead of time, couples will automatically find themselves in a setting with familiar faces where they will once again consider some of the essential questions that newlyweds need to be asked.

### **Marriage Tune-Ups**

For couples who are not newlyweds but would still benefit from follow-up style sessions – which is every couple, by the way – we are going to be offering marriage “tune-ups.” Think of it like a 15-point inspection you might have done on your vehicle, only for your marriage.

These “tune-ups” will be done in a group setting, with time to work through material with your spouse. On a yearly basis, every couple who is part of the church will be strongly encouraged to attend one of three identical sessions which will be offered throughout the year. It's all about having some fun while taking care of our marriages at the same time.

### **Hot Date Night**

An important goal in any marriage should be the development of relationships with other married couples. Of course, this can happen in a variety of social settings, but what's the harm in having one more opportunity to get people together, right?

On a bi-monthly basis, Hot Date Nights will provide opportunities to meet with other married couples to both learn some tips on developing a healthy marriage and grow together in a casual social atmosphere. We will remind one another that we're not alone in our struggles and that there are people we can lean on and have fun with along the journey.

### **A Culture of Communication**

One of the primary goals we have as a church in our support of relationships is to create an environment in which it's not taboo to talk to someone about your marriage. We want to affirm the value of inviting others to both encourage and challenge us in our marriages in ways that are respectful of the intimacy of a marriage relationship, but not adverse to input.

We will strive to make the best marriage-enriching resources available to the church community, recommending avenues for couples to pursue further relationship development, including the concept of Relationship Coaching.

### Crash Course

From time to time, a couple will be in a position where they feel the future of their marriage is in question. We want to acknowledge the reality of such circumstances and will seek to advise couples on where to seek help, whether through Relationship Coaching or professional counseling. As a community of faith, we believe that God can bring healing and peace to even the most discouraging circumstances, and are committed to praying for reconciliation.

### Celebration

On a regular basis, we will celebrate with those who reach significant milestones in their marriage. Every engagement that is announced, every new couple that pledges their vows, and every anniversary that arrives is a reason to celebrate and to pray that God would continue to strengthen each and every marriage in our church family.