

GOING FURTHER: RESOURCES

The Meaning of Marriage by Timothy and Kathy Keller

Marriage: God's Design for Intimacy by John and Susan Yates

Preparing for Marriage by David Boehi, Brent Nelson, Jeff Schulte, and Lloyd Shadrach

Sex, Jesus, and the Conversations the Church Forgot by Mo Isom

Marriage Mentorship

Premarital Counseling



THE LIVING TOGETHER OPTION

A CULTURAL SHIFT

Before the 1970s, it was uncommon for unmarried men and women to live together. Today, cohabitation is often seen as a necessary “next step” in relationships before committing to marriage. Many assume that living together can help avoid mistakes that might lead to divorce. But is this assumption correct? How should followers of Jesus Christ approach the idea of living together before marriage?

THE RESEARCH

Marriage remains a significant life goal for over 75% of young adults. However, research shows that living together before marriage often undermines the foundation of a strong marriage. According to Dr. Scott Stanley, a University professor and psychologist, couples who live together tend to keep their options open rather than fully committing, which weakens the bond. These relationships frequently slide into marriage rather than being intentional decisions, resulting in the lowest levels of marital satisfaction and the highest rates of divorce.

Statistics reveal that couples who live together before marriage have a 50% higher divorce rate than those who don't. Additionally, cohabiting relationships see increased rates of domestic violence and unfaithfulness. When children are involved, the situation becomes even more concerning. Three-quarters of children born to cohabiting couples experience their parents' separation by age sixteen, compared to only one-third of children born to married parents.



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These children are also at higher risk for abuse. The overwhelming evidence suggests that living together is not the best path for those who desire a strong, lasting marriage and family. Many believe their situation or relationship to be an exception to the norm, and it's natural to want to think that way. However, this mindset is only part of the issue. As followers of Christ, believers are called to align their relationships with God's design, trusting that His ways are higher than their own (Isaiah 55:8–9). While it's tempting to rely on personal feelings or cultural norms, Scripture invites believers to seek wisdom and walk in obedience, even when it challenges their assumptions.

GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

The Bible clearly teaches that God designed physical intimacy to be enjoyed within the sacred covenant of marriage. Genesis 2:24 states, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This one-flesh union is more than physical—it is spiritual, emotional, and relational, drawing a man and woman into deeper commitment and unity.

Outside of marriage, sexual intimacy creates confusion by suggesting a level of commitment that has not been established. This can lead to emotional pain and trauma similar to divorce. Sometimes, couples avoid marriage precisely because they fear divorce. This fear can overshadow their view of marriage itself, leading them to see marriage as a risk rather than a sacred commitment. Isn't it worth reconsidering this perspective? Should the fear of a potential negative outcome devalue what God has designed to be a beautiful and covenantal relationship? As followers of Christ, believers are called to view marriage through the lens of God's purpose and promise, not through the lens of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). God calls His followers to honor marriage and avoid sexual immorality.

Hebrews 13:4 instructs, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." By trusting God's design, believers not only grow closer to Him but also experience clarity and peace in their relationships.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

As couples explore faith or consider church membership, they often question the practice of living together before marriage. The church seeks to be a resource for guidance and health in relationships, upholding marriage as a sacred, God-ordained institution.

Ephesians 5:31–33 describes marriage as a reflection of Christ's love for the church, teaching, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother

and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

Strong marriages are easier to build within a community of believers who can provide encouragement, mentorship, and accountability. Couples who have weathered the challenges of marriage can offer wisdom and serve as role models, especially for those whose families have been marked by divorce or instability. Proverbs 15:22 reminds us, "Without counsel, plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."

Christian counselors, mentors, and church leaders can also assist couples in discerning their readiness for marriage or addressing relational challenges. Premarital counseling can offer clarity and a biblical foundation for navigating decisions about romance, marriage, and family life.

A CALL TO TRUST GOD

Choosing to live according to God's design for marriage requires trust and obedience. By seeking His guidance and the support of His people, couples can build a God-honoring relationship that reflects His love and faithfulness. May all who read these words take to heart the words of Psalm 127:1: "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." When God is allowed to build the "house," there is nothing to fear.

For those considering the next step in their relationship, the church invites them to explore what it means to pursue marriage God's way. Whether through mentorship, counseling, or simply walking alongside them in faith, the church is there to help them honor God in their journey toward marriage and family.