

# Living Together

## *Taking Next Steps*

Living together before marriage used to be frowned upon in our culture, but today it is more commonplace, accepted as an important “next step” for couples before committing to marriage.

Couples who choose to live together do so for many reasons, maybe because they feel it is logistically convenient, financially beneficial or because they want to avoid making a mistake that could lead to a painful divorce. But how should a follower of Jesus Christ view the living together option?

### **The Research**

Over 75% of young single adults include marriage as a significant life goal. However, the divorce rate among those who live together before marriage is 50% higher than it is among couples who don't.

Extensive research conducted by University professor and psychologist Dr. Scott Stanley revealed that couples who live together undermine a strong bond by trying to keep their options open. While many of these couples eventually slide into marriage, their relationships demonstrate the lowest marital satisfaction.

### **The Design**

Christianity teaches that God designed physical intimacy to occur exclusively within the sacred commitment of marriage where the powerful bonding effects of sexuality draw a couple closer.

Outside of marriage, however, the bonding nature of sex confuses the relationship by implying a commitment that has not been made. Despite trying to avoid the pain of divorce, a breakup after sexual union creates similar emotional trauma.

Trusting God's design and obeying his call to honor marriage (Hebrews 13:4) and to avoid sexual immorality (Ephesians 5:3) not only draws us into closer relationship with Him, but it brings clarity rather than uncertainty with one another.

### **The Church**

Many couples first question the option of living together while exploring Christian faith or local church membership. This church would love to become a resource for clarity and health in your relationship because we believe marriage is a God-ordained, sacred

institution. But we also want to be a safe place for you to grow closer to Christ, even if you're already living together.

The Bible describes the marital bond as a picture of the love between God and his people (Ephesians 5:31-33). It is much easier to learn about marriage and nurture a strong relationship while growing with other believers—especially those who are a little further down the road.

Couples who have been married for a while can provide guidance and input as you make decisions about romance and marriage. They can also serve as models, which is particularly helpful to those with parents who divorced or never married.

Christian counselors and church leaders can also help you determine if you are ready to shift into pre-marital counseling or if you need to re-evaluate a potentially harmful relationship.

In either case, we encourage you to seek wise counsel as you pursue a God-honoring marriage and family life.

## **GOING FURTHER – Resources**

### **Recommended Books:**

Some books are available for checkout at the Faith@Home Center or for purchase online.

*Before You Live Together* (by Dave Gudgel) a short book full of helpful insight to those who are experiencing or considering the option of living together.

*The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation & the Strong Benefits of Marriage* (by Glenn T. Stanton) With credible data & compassion, Stanton explores the reasons why the cohabitation trend is growing; outlines its negative outcomes for men, women & children; and makes a case for why marriage is still the best arrangement for the flourishing of couples in society.