

# THE LIVING TOGETHER OPTION

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Prior to the 1970s it was rare for an unmarried man and woman to live together. Today it is much more common and accepted as an important "next step" for couples before committing to marriage. We often assume living together can help us avoid making a mistake that could lead to a painful divorce.

## Is that a correct assumption? How should a follower of Jesus Christ view the living together option?

### The Research

Over 75% of young single adults list marriage as a significant life goal. However, couples who move in together actually decrease the likelihood of creating a strong marriage. The divorce rate among those who live together before marriage is 50% higher than it is among couples who don't.

Extensive research of the effects of cohabitation on marriage and the different ways that men and women view living together 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 and survival rates, and also report higher rates of domestic violence and unfaithfulness.

When a cohabiting woman becomes pregnant, there is a high probability the man will end the relationship within two years. Three-quarters of children born to unmarried couples will see their parents split-up before they reach their sixteenth birthday. These children are also much more likely to experience abuse. The data overwhelmingly suggests that if your long-term goal is a happy marriage and family, then living together is not the best option.

### The Design

Cohabitation violates God's intention for His people. God designed physical intimacy to occur exclusively within the sacred commitment of marriage where the powerful bonding effects of sexuality draw the man and woman closer together. 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) strengthens our relationship with Him and with our spouse.

### The Church

Many couples first question the option of living together while exploring Christian faith or local church membership. Our church wants to help you experience clarity and health in your relationship. We believe marriage is a God-ordained, sacred institution. In Ephesians 5:31-33 the Bible describes the marital bond as a picture of the love between Christ (the groom) and the church (His bride). It is much easier to nurture a strong marriage while learning and 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 premarital 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.

## The Truth

The truth about cohabitating couples is that they're living outside of God's will. According to Genesis 2:24, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,*" God intended that the man should first hold fast to his wife and then the two become one flesh. Premarital cohabitation, reverses this order or it eliminates the marriage component altogether. This is not God's design, and in fact, it is sin (Hebrews 13:4).

Christians couples living together outside of marriage are out of the will of God and need to repent and seek God as to whether the person they are living with is the right one for them. If it is God's will for them to be together they should marry, and if not, they need to change their living arrangements.

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## GOING FURTHER

### RESOURCES

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*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 and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*

by Glenn T. Stanton

Explores the reasons why the cohabitation trend is growing; outlines its negative outcomes for men, women and children; and makes a case for why marriage is still the best arrangement for the flourishing of couples in society.

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