

“Isn’t a high-conflict marriage more damaging to children than having parents who have never been married?” A home, even with imperfect parents, can provide safety for a child. God, the creator of children, knows that they need the nurturing of both a dad and mom who mentor male and female roles and practice commitment even in times of stress. Husbands and wives will always remain unique personalities with individual strengths and weaknesses (sometimes in opposition to one another). But children who watch parents sacrifice personal desires and work through difficult issues for their sake are children who grow up mindful of their value.

“I’m not ready for marriage, and I sure don’t want to lose my freedom.” If you’re not ready for the commitment of marriage, then you don’t qualify for the benefits of marriage.

“Isn’t marriage just another name for oppression and domination?” Not in God’s world. The Christian husband is called to love his wife as Christ loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25). That love was so great that Christ sacrificed His very life to redeem it.

“I’m afraid I’ll lose too much of myself.” The partnership of marriage is appreciated by many men and women who choose Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 for their wedding text. (Ponder these verses.) Only God, the Creator of marriage, can help two distinct genders and two unique personalities harmonize for the benefit of each other and those around them. The joy in Jesus Christ comes from giving, not getting.

“I don’t want to lose him. He says we’re going to get married after he gets a better job and we can afford a nicer house. So, I let him move in.” It is vitally important that men and women recognize their dignity as creations of God. Their value comes from what Jesus has done for them. Confident in this, a woman can help the man she loves by encouraging him to a high standard of behavior. It is the woman who, in many ways, brings dignity and sanctity to marriage. She does this because, in God’s created order, she is the relational one and bearer of life. There is a certain natural vulnerability in this role. The woman actually places herself and future children at greater risk when she does not hold him accountable but, instead, enables him to “play house” and act as if they are married. A woman who doesn’t expect and receive commitment because she’s afraid she’ll lose her man is a woman who will become more vulnerable. Her children will become more vulnerable. Commitment is what holds a man and woman together. It is what holds parents to their children. It is not verbal commitment or even legal commitment; it is, for the Christian, holy and honorable commitment.

The single, tempting question that Satan asked in the Garden of Eden was this: “Did God really say ...?” Satan asks the same question of men and women today. He wants us to doubt God’s plan for marriage and family. Clever to design a plan of our own, we take momentary delight in our modern sophistication. Living together before marriage hurts though. It hurts men, women, and, most of all, children. It hurts society. It falls terribly short of God’s beautiful design for the benefit of all.

Why not just live together?

Because such living is impatient and seeks its own way. (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)

New life in Christ calls for trust in the Creator of marriage—God Himself. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

God’s love “rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:6b-7)

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*Why
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Together?*

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“Living together” is:

- a) **A way to practice monogamy.**
- b) **The best way to avoid the pain of divorce.**
- c) **What you do until you can afford to get married and host a big reception.**

In today’s culture, all of the above seem to be true. Cohabiting men and women claim that living together satisfies their need to be with someone but, at the same time, doesn’t demand commitment.

Commitment, however, is about trust. It is about faithfulness. The commitment of marriage boldly proclaims, “No matter what, I promise to stay with you.” It is this commitment that not only builds but sustains society.

Marriage is God’s idea, but He designed it with the best interests of society in mind. God created marriage between one man and one woman as a foundational structure for family and society. Marriage is, therefore, more than a religious institution; it is a civil institution with a future of hope.

Ben and Abby have been living together for two years. “We love each other, but the thought of divorce is frightening. We want to avoid that ugliness and pain.” What happens though when one “live-in” relationship breaks up and a new one begins? What happens to trust? Faithfulness? Promise? Christians and non-Christians alike agree that humans are both relational and spiritual beings. What risk is there to hearts and souls when we enter into and exit out of intimate relationships?

“Playing house” should not be confused with “making a home.” Living together may seem “safe,” but it’s really not secure. The promise to “love, honor, and cherish” is the thread that weaves through a healthy home. On the other hand, the lack of commitment more easily creates an environment of fear and distrust.

What About the Children?

Studies abound that prove the dependency of sons and daughters on the consistency, stability, and mentoring of moms and dads committed to one another in the faithfulness of marriage.

It is God’s perfect plan that children be raised by moms and dads who are committed to one another within the bond of marriage. God’s plan didn’t change even though the first husband, Adam, and his wife, Eve, disobeyed God with their sin. Their sin brought difficulty, disappointment, and sorrow into marriage and family life. Even so, marriage between one man and one woman remains the best way to:

- Prepare for and build a family.
- Bring new life into the world through the procreative act of sex.
- Create an environment for fathers to role-model masculinity and mothers to role-model femininity.
- Nurture a place of safety and stability apart from the world.
- Connect children to their past and propel them into the future.

Families are imperfect in a sin-filled world; nevertheless, history proves that civilized societies are built upon the foundation of

marriage and family. Biblical marriage—that is marriage between one man and one woman—is in the best interest of both children and the culture in which they grow up.

Many agree that out-of-wedlock births are a real problem for society. The answer, they believe, is stronger government programs to help men be more responsible fathers. In reality, men are more responsible fathers when they look to Jesus Christ. Before they can be responsible fathers, they need to be responsible husbands.

Cohabitation Hurts

Marriage makes a unique economic contribution to society. In a family where the husband/father takes his role of provider seriously, there seems to be a stronger sense of motivation for success. Being responsible for the well-being of a family—wife and children—gives the man a huge incentive to do better in the home, neighborhood, and workplace. (It appears that poverty rates for children living in unmarried households are much higher than for those living in married households.)

Cohabitation takes young singles off the path to marriage and puts children at risk, especially if the man in the house isn’t the child’s father. What does a boy learn from the “live-in partner” who won’t commit to his mother? What does a girl learn from a mom who shares a bed with a man but never comes under the honorable and protective covering of his name?

Talking Points

The heart of marriage is not compatibility. It is commitment.

“We think we should live together first to know if we’re compatible.” Two unique personalities are never compatible all the time. It takes work, sacrifice, and even some compromise for a husband and wife to stay in tune with one another. Couples who choose to live together have a different attitude than those who marry. A couple who lives together is, in essence, saying, “I’ll stay with you if we can get along.”

“I’ve been told that marriage kills the romance.” Romance is a good thing, but it cannot sustain a relationship. Strong sexual attraction and a “tingly feeling” love can come or go depending on mood, health, and circumstances.

“My parents experienced an ugly divorce. I don’t want to be just another statistic.” God’s wondrous design for marriage has been distorted by sin. However, God didn’t say, “I give up! Do whatever you want!” It is in the middle of brokenness that the Christian learns about true faithfulness and commitment. When we were broken in sin, God did not abandon us. He did not divorce us. Instead, He demonstrated selfless, sacrificial, servant-style love. “[W]hile we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8b). Yes, in a broken and sin-filled world there are broken marriages. Yet there remains a true, spiritual commitment as we find in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.