



Cohabitation: A Conversation Starter by Brad Hambrick

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When dating or engaged couples are preparing for marriage they often ask questions like this one:

My fiancé and I are getting married in a few months, but have been living together for a while. When we were doing our pre-marital counseling we were told living together before marriage was wrong and that we should live separately until we're married. We want to honor God, but don't understand why this is a big deal if we love each other and will be married in a few months anyway. We're not trying to be rebellious, but we want to understand why a change like this would be necessary.

That's a good, honest question. Let me start by saying if you're thinking about marriage that's a good thing. Marriage can be one of God's greatest earthly blessings. Our goal at The Summit Church is to help you lay the best possible foundation for a lasting and satisfying marriage.

But both statistics and the Bible indicate that living together before marriage decreases the quality and longevity of marriage. We don't think we would be a good friend to you, your relationship, or future marriage if we didn't raise this concern for you to consider.

Secular studies (meaning those without a "Christian bias") consistently show several things.

- The divorce rate is higher among couples who live together before they marry. Consider these statistics...
 - ... about 50% of all marriages end in divorce.
 - ... but 67% of couples who cohabit before marriage divorce.
 - ... while only 30-40% of first marriages who don't cohabit before marriage end in divorce.
 - That means living together before marriage makes divorce twice as likely for a first marriage.
- Even the health and financial benefits commonly associated with marriage are less for couples who cohabit before marriage.
- And the sex life of couples who cohabit before marriage is not as strong as those who don't.
- Actually, the only "benefit" from cohabiting found in secular studies is that live-in boyfriends do more housework, on average, than married men.

I'll let you make sense of the last point and make that a point of emphasis at our next men's event.

There are many sociological reasons for these statistics, that could be discussed but that would come across as "piling on." We do believe these statistics point to a deeper spiritual reality – God created marriage and assigned living together and sex as special privileges that come with marriage. From the very beginning of creation God gave the pattern for marriage:

When doing the first marriage ceremony in **Genesis 2:24** God says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."



In **John 4:18** when Jesus was having one of His more famous conversations with the woman at the well one of the things He pointed out to call her to repentance is that the man she was living with was not her husband.

Hebrews 13:4 says, “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.”

The Bible is clear that God made marriage to be a covenant between one man and one woman for life. God created marriage and it is when we follow His pattern that we experience the blessing God intended marriage to be.

If the idea of marriage-as-covenant is new or confusing to you, I would recommend the video at bradhambrick.com/covenant. This video will help you see the significance of the marriage ceremony as a covenant making ceremony.

There are many reasons why couples believe it is necessary or “more practical” to live together before marriage:

- Financial benefit of one rent or mortgage payment
- “Try out” marriage to make sure you’re compatible
- Thinking it would damage your relationship to split up before marriage

But if these perceived benefits were actually helpful, then the statistics would not be what they are. My goal here isn’t to debate you through a computer screen. We’re not trying to “win an argument.” Instead, we (as a church) want to come alongside you and help you honor God in your marital preparation.

Here is what we would ask you to consider doing next:

- Commit to honor God and give your marriage the best opportunity to flourish by choosing to live separately and abstain from sex until you are married.
- If you think this is not possible for financial reasons, let your small group leader or a Summit pastor know so we can help you with living arrangements. You don’t have to follow God alone. You have a church family to help you in this journey.
- Continue or begin in our church’s Preparing for Marriage ministry. Information about this program can be found at summitrdu.com/pfm. The more you learn about God’s design for marriage the more the principles of this conversation will make sense to you.

Last of all, I want to say “thank you” for taking these few minutes to consider how to put your marriage in the best position to succeed. That is a sign of humility and maturity which should be a blessing to your marriage for years to come. We want The Summit to be a safe place for the two of you to follow God together and experience the joy of life together as God designed.

Sources from “Does Living Together Before Marriage Lead to Divorce?” by Molly Edmonds found at <http://health.howstuffworks.com/relationships/advice/living-together-before-marriage.htm>

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