



**CREATING A
GOSPEL-CENTERED MARRIAGE
Mentor Training Manual**

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Mentors in Waiting,

Thank you for your interest in being a pre-marital mentor. This is as personally rewarding and maritally enriching of a ministry opportunity as I can imagine. You will have the opportunity to bless generations as you share your marriage experience (the good and the hard, the unique and the mundane) with engaged couples getting ready to embark on their own marriage.

As you think about becoming a mentor, pause for a moment and think about how many things in marriage you may have learned “the hard way.”

What are the questions you wish you could have asked a mature couple early in your marriage?

What are your personal stories or lessons that you think would benefit an engaged couple?

Our goal the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* (GCM) mentoring curriculum is to create an opportunity for you to “fill these gaps” and share those stories with engaged couples. We want to provide the structure which allows you to do this within a holistic marriage preparation curriculum, so you do not feel the pressure to “cover everything” or be the only voice speaking into their world. You have two simple goals:

1. **Build Relationships** – If the engaged couples trusts you enough that they want to call when good things happen and to get your perspective when hard things happen, you’ve done your job.
2. **Share Your Journey** – Throughout the mentoring process you will be offering testimony. Learn alongside the engage couple, and share when/how the core lessons in GCM became real to you.

In the pages that follow we will explain how this ministry works to set you up to do these two things. For now, I simply want to say *“Thank you” for being willing to share your life with engaged couples*. I believe this ministry will be a joy that God uses not only to bless young couples but to continually breathe new life into your own marriage as well.

In Christ,

Brad Hambrick

Table of Contents

In this training we will cover four sections. These are not four distinct topics, but four ways of saying the same thing from different angles. As you move from one section to the next, the process of being a GCM mentor should become increasingly intuitive for you.

1. Overview of the Mentoring Process Page 4

This is a one-page summary of your role. It serves, if you will, as a **“job description”** for your role. For those whose mind cannot rest until they know what is expected of them, we provide this up front so you can mentally rest and enjoy learning about the rest of the GCM mentoring process.

2. Content for Each Meeting Page 5

This is the step-by-step, meeting-by-meeting instructions about mentoring. It serves as a **“check list”** you can review before each meeting to make sure you are remembering correctly what you need to do in that meeting.

3. From Registration to You to Completion Page 8

This is the phase-by-phase journey of the engaged couple through GCM. It serves as a **“road map”** the engaged couple’s journey through GCM. You will notice that of the five phases, the mentoring relationship is phase three of the journey.

4. Other FAQ’s Page 11

In this section we provide responses to the frequently asked questions asked by / of marriage mentors. These cover some of the hard, or uncomfortable moments that may arise while mentoring. Don’t allow the fact that we cover this last, to leave a bad taste in your mouth or be apprehensive about mentoring. You’re going to love this ministry!

Overview of the Mentoring Process

Our goal is to keep the process simple, so you can focus on building relationships with each engaged couple you mentor.

1. **Contact the engaged couple before each meeting** to remind them of what they need to do for that meeting. Remember, they're planning a wedding and life's moving fast. They'll need your reminders.
2. **Do the homework alongside your engaged couple.** Learn with them. The GCM mentoring process is set up so that the content you cover is a little different with each couple you mentor. This keeps things fresh for you.
3. **Model authentic conversation** about what is good and hard, exciting and mundane about marriage. The measure of your success is how honest the engage couple is. Nothing fosters honesty like authenticity.
4. **Repeat six times before the wedding** and at least **twice after the wedding.** After this, we hope you stay in touch with your couples. But after these eight meetings, the relationship transitions from a formal mentoring relationship to an informal friendship.

That's it. I hope it seems simple and exciting. We'll give you everything you need logistically so you can focus on building relationships. Here a few more early FAQ's about the mentoring process.

- **How long should each meeting last?** A given mentoring encounter will likely be 90 minutes to 2 hours; that is, about the length of time you spend together when you have friends over for dinner.
- **Where do we meet?** Most often, mentoring sessions happen in your home. But they can also happen at a restaurant or coffee shop. Select the location that best serves the purpose of mentoring – cultivating relationship and conversation.
- **How frequently do we meet?** Trying to meet weekly would be overwhelming. Meeting less frequently than monthly does not allow the relationship building to be as fruitful. Meeting about every 2-3 weeks is good. Often working backwards from the couples wedding date – if already set – helps you determine a wise frequency of meeting.
- **How should we arrange the time?** Allow time for natural “get to know you” conversation each time. Be curious about your couple and allow them to get to know you. Strive to spend at least 45 minutes discussing the content from the GCM curriculum you selected for that meeting.
- **Do You have a recommended format for emailing couples to schedule meetings?** Yes, here is a template. Please personalize it as much as you like.

Name and Name

We greatly enjoyed our [number] meeting. [Include a sentence or two about something memorable from that meeting.]

We wanted to remind you we scheduled our next meeting for [day] [time] [place].

At our next meeting we decided we would cover lesson [#] from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: [Topic]*. You can find that material at bradhambrick.com/gcm. We have been thinking and praying for this time and look forward to this next meeting.

Also, don't forget to send us your results from the evaluation from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: [Topic Next]* seminar, so we can decide together what to talk about at our next meeting as well.

If you have any questions or need to call us for anything, here is our phone number [###-###-####].

- **How do we know what to talk about from the GCM curriculum?** That's what we'll at next...

Content for Each Meeting

Meeting One: During the first meeting you will discuss “Lesson 2” from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Foundations* seminar. This is the only meeting that has the same, assigned content for each couple. Before the meeting the engaged couple has four assignments.

- Complete the “Sketching Our Story” Exercise
- Complete the “Celebrating Our Non-Moral Differences” Profile
- Review the Purity Covenant¹
- Complete Evaluation from the *GCM: Foundations* Seminar

The bulk of this meeting is spent on the “Sketching our Story” (getting to know key life events) and “Celebrating Our Non-Moral Differences” (getting to know personality) exercises. Again, the goal is to get to know the couple and allow them to know you.

The purity covenant is something we offer to provide support to couples in an aspect of their relationship that should be becoming more difficult. We don’t want the couple to feel condemned for struggling. We want to open the conversation and offer encouragement.

Based on the results from the *GCM: Foundations* evaluation, you decide with the couple which lesson(s) to discuss at the next meeting. At each mentoring meeting, you will discuss one or two lessons from a GCM seminar. Discussion questions are provided with each lesson. You choose the lesson(s) that serve the couple best.

Meeting Two: During the second meeting you will discuss whichever lesson(s) from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Foundations* seminar agreed upon at the end of your first meeting. Before the meeting the engaged couple has two assignments.

- Watch and/or read the selected lesson(s) from the *GCM: Foundations* seminar
- Complete Evaluation from the *GCM: Communication* Seminar

Request: At this meeting, ask the engaged couple, “Do you mind connecting us via email with the pastor leading your wedding ceremony? Often pastors like to speak with a couple’s mentor. We would like to be available to let the pastor know of the work you are doing in the GCM program.”

Based on the results from the *GCM: Communication* evaluation, you decide with the couple which lesson(s) to discuss at the next meeting. Discussion questions are provided with each lesson. You choose the lesson(s) that serve the couple best.

Meeting Three: During the third meeting you will discuss whichever lesson(s) from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Communication* seminar agreed upon at the end of your second meeting. Before the meeting the engaged couple has two assignments.

- Watch and/or read the selected lesson(s) from the *GCM: Communication* seminar
- Complete Evaluation from the *GCM: Finances* seminar

Based on the results from the *GCM: Finances* evaluation, you decide with the couple which lesson(s) to discuss at the next meeting. *** Unless there is a pressing concern to focus on another lesson, it is recommended you devote this meeting to Lesson 3 on creating and using a family budget. *** Discussion questions are provided with each lesson. You choose the lesson(s) that serve the couple best.

Meeting Four: During the fourth meeting you will discuss whichever lesson(s) from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Finances* seminar agreed upon at the end of your third meeting. Before the meeting the engaged couple has two assignments.

¹ A sample of this covenant is on page 7 in this packet and a PDF can be found at bradhambrick.com/gcm.

- Watch and/or read the selected lesson(s) from the *GCM: Finances* seminar
- Complete Evaluation from the *GCM: Decision Making* Seminar

Based on the results from the *GCM: Decision Making* evaluation, you decide with the couple which lesson(s) to discuss at the next meeting. Discussion questions are provided with each lesson. You choose the lesson(s) that serve the couple best.

Meeting Five: During the fifth meeting you will discuss whichever lesson(s) from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Decision Making* seminar agreed upon at the end of your fourth meeting. Before the meeting the engaged couple has two assignments.

- Watch and/or read the selected lesson(s) from the *GCM: Decision Making* seminar
- Complete Evaluation from the *GCM: Intimacy* seminar.

Based on the results from the *GCM: Intimacy* evaluation, you decide with the couple which lesson(s) to discuss at the next meeting. Discussion questions are provided with each lesson. You choose the lesson(s) that serve the couple best.

Meeting Six: During the sixth meeting you will discuss whichever lesson(s) from the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage: Intimacy* seminar agreed upon at the end of your fifth meeting. Before the meeting the engaged couple has one assignment.

- Watch and/or read the selected lesson(s) from the *GCM: Intimacy* seminar

There are no more evaluations 😊. At the end of this meeting, it is recommended that you set the final two meeting. If the first six meetings were completed before the wedding, it is good if these meetings can occur at 6 weeks and 3 months after the wedding. There is no homework for these final two meetings.

Meetings Seven and Eight: The focus of these meetings is follow-up and reinforcement. After catching up on how the couple is adapting to married life, the outline for this meeting can be as simple as:

- What has been good?
- What has been harder than you expected?
- What questions do you have?

By this point, you should be a trusted set of friends whose opinion and perspective are valued. You are helping the couple discern what challenges are normal and brainstorming ways to approach these challenges. If the couple is facing moderate to severe challenges, your role – as mentors – is to affirm their courage to confide these challenges, recommend additional help from a more experienced pastor or counselor, and continue to support them as they take these steps.

Here a few more FAQ's about the mentoring content.

- **Do we continue after the eighth meeting?** This is a choice between you and the couple you are mentoring. We hope the answer is yes. At this juncture, however, the nature of your relationship would transition from “formal mentors” (working through the GCM curriculum) to “experienced, valued friend.”
- **What if we're uncomfortable talking about [blank] or don't feel like we do a good job with [blank]?** Mentors are not expected to be experts at every area of marriage. That would be an unrealistic expectation. *One of the greatest benefits of the mentoring relationship is for the engaged couple see a model of how to talk about their strengths and weaknesses in a grace-based environment without embarrassment or shame.* If you are uncomfortable with a subject, then you might enlist a couple from your small group to take that meeting. Model what its like to ask for help.
- **Where do we find each GCM curriculum for mentoring?** Recordings to all of the GCM series can be found at bradhambrick.com/gcm. This page has links to the video and podcast version of each GCM seminar. PDF's of the notebooks can be requested by emailing counseling@summitchurch.com. Dates and times for live presentations of the GCM series can be found at bradhambrick.com/events.

PURITY COVENANT

Biblical Standard

I Thessalonians 4:3-8: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”

**IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S COMMAND,
I PROMISE TO PROTECT YOUR SEXUAL PURITY FROM THIS DAY
UNTIL OUR HONEYMOON.**

Biblical Standard

I Corinthians 6:18-20: “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been brought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

**BECAUSE I RESPECT AND HONOR YOU,
I COMMIT TO BUILDING UP THE INNER PERSON OF YOUR HEART
RATHER THAN VIOLATING YOU.**

Biblical Standard

Acts 24:16: “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.”

**I PLEDGE TO SHOW MY LOVE FOR YOU
IN WAYS THAT ALLOW BOTH OF US TO MAINTAIN A CLEAR CONSCIENCE
BEFORE GOD AND EACH OTHER.**

This is our promise of purity to God and one another

Fiance Signature

Fiance Signature

*** This covenant is adapted from *Preparing for Marriage* edited by Dennis Rainey (pages 238-239)

If you are living together and this prevents you from being able to sign this covenant, then please talk to your mentor couple about this challenge and visit the conversation starter video at bradhambrick.com/cohabitation.

From Registration to You to Completion

It is good to know the journey of how a couple arrives on your doorstep and what the journey through GCM looks like. We want you to feel like an informed tour guide to the before, during, and after experience of GCM.

Step One: Learn about GCM

Help us permeate our church with awareness about GCM by talking about this ministry. Word-of-mouth chatter does several things: (a) it makes sure engaged or dating couples know about this ministry, (b) it builds a positive expectation in engaged or dating couples about what GCM can mean for their marriage, and (c) it helps us recruit new mentors. You're going to enjoy this ministry. When you do, talk about it... that way more engaged and experienced couples get connected to GCM.

Step Two: Register for GCM

Once a couple expresses interest in GCM we ask them to complete a registration form.² The fee collected goes to offset printing and other administrative costs related to the ministry.

The couple will receive a letter describing GCM and explaining how we'd like them to approach this ministry in order to gain optimal benefit from it during a very busy season of their life (see page 9).³

Step Three: Contact and Scheduling by Mentor Couple (You)

We ask that within 24-48 hours of receiving a mentoring assignment that you contact your engaged couple. When you call, express your excitement about the opportunity to be a part of this season in the couple's life. In your initial contact set a time to meet with the couple.

Step Four: Completing GCM

When the couple completes GCM they receive another letter (sample on page 10) and a minibook, *Building a Marriage to Last: Five Essential Habits for Couples*, from the church to encourage them in "next steps" for the "post-pre-marital" phase of their marriage. The minibook is a brief, 24-page overview of the basic habits of a healthy marriage.

Step Five: After GCM

We keep a database of couples who participate in GCM. Periodically, we send reminders about other marriage enrichment activities these couples can participate in. This is a way, in addition to your continued relationship, we can impress upon young couples the importance of continuing to invest in their marriage.

² If you are at The Summit Church, this form can be found at summitchurch.com/gcm. If you are at another church, we provide the information in this packet so you can develop something comparable.

³ If you are a leader catalyzing GCM at another church, you will need to decide who this letter should be from and what edits may be needed to contextualize for your church.

Excited Engaged Couple,

If you are reading this letter then I know a few things about you:

1. You are entering a very exciting season that will shape the rest of your life.
2. You are probably overwhelmed with the number of details to plan in the coming weeks/months.
3. You have made the very wise choice to pursue pre-marital counseling.

The *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* ministry (GCM) will do an excellent job of preparing you to experience the blessing of marriage as God intended. This ministry has two primary components which work together in tandem.

1. The *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminars
2. A Mentoring Relationship

Your mentor couple will be contacting you soon. An overview of the things you will cover in this mentor relationship can be found at www.bradhambrick.com/gcm.

In this letter, I want to help you get the most from your GCM experience. *While GCM is filled with excellent content, we do not believe it will be the content that changes the next decades of your married life.* We recognize that there is so much going on in your life that absorbing everything you need to know about marriage would be impossible.

We want you to **focus on two things in GCM** (while retaining as much content as you can in this busy season):

1. **Relationships:** The best thing you can do for your marriage is to surround it with healthy relationships. Your mentors should be one of these primary relationships.
2. **Post-Marital Habits:** In GCM you will be exposed to many resources and practices to enrich your marriage. The best question you can be asking yourself is, "When and how will we implement these during our first year of marriage?" *Your first year of marriage is a time when, intentionally or not, you will be creating the foundational habits for the rest of your life.* Be intentional. Start well.

We (as a church) are very excited to walk with you; not just during your engagement, but for as long as you call RDU home. We want to hear the stories of the great things God does in/through your marriage and be a part of that journey. Your involvement in GCM is a great next step in that journey.

In Christ,

Brad Hambrick
Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church

Congratulation on Completing GCM!

Whether this letter finds you just before or just after your wedding, it signifies that you have faithfully completed the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* program (GCM). We want to commend you for investing in your marriage over the last several months. You will never regret having laid a solid foundation for your most enduring relationship.

The question before you is, “**What now?** Now that we’ve completed GCM, what should we do to enrich our marriage and make our home a place increasingly marked by the gospel?” I would like to make a few suggestions that we recommend to everyone completing GCM.

- **Stay in touch with your mentors.** Their presence and role in your life should extend well beyond six meetings before your wedding. Especially during the first year of marriage connect with them when you have questions, face challenges, or make memories. Let them be a Romans 12:15 presence in your marriage. You forged these relationships for a reason. Stay connected to experience the benefits.
- **Be in a small group.** Few things are more important to your marriage than to be part of a small group where you are honest about life’s challenges, encouraged, and reminded of the things that are most important. Before our wedding, most of us have single-people-friends. When we get married, that often means we don’t have married-people friends to speak into our lives. Be intentional about finding a small group with other married couples.
- **Study one *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminar with your small group.** This is a great way to review and implement all the things you “learned and wanted to do” during your time in GCM. Changes are you just focused on one or two lessons from each seminar. There is more to learn. As you gain experience being married, you’ll be surprised by the things that stand out which you missed even in the lessons you covered with your mentors.
- **Be on the lookout for marriage enrichment opportunities.** Periodically, we will send you emails about other marriage enrichment opportunities. You won’t be able to do all of them. But each time you get an email, commit to do two things: (1) seriously consider whether you can participate... don’t just mindlessly delete the email, and (2) ask each other, “How are we doing?” If nothing else, the email can serve as a prompt to intermittently ask this important question.

As a gift, we included a copy of the *Building a Marriage to Last: Five Essential Habits for Couples* minibook. This is a brief, 24-page minibook. It covers the basic habits of a healthy marriage. *Take the time to read it and make sure to start your marriage with the habits to last.* This is the one time in your life when you’re building all of your habits from scratch.

Again, thank you for investing the last several months in GCM. We pray God uses this investment to bless your family for years to come.

Congratulations,

Brad Hambrick
Pastor of Counseling, The Summit Church

Other FAQ's

1. What if the couple comes into the program late (close to their wedding)?

Honestly, this will frequently be the case. This is why we put the “red flag” screening in the evaluation discussed at the your first mentoring meeting (more will be said about this in the next question).

We cannot be a social engineer; forcing couples to do things in an ideal fashion. We can provide excellent comprehensive (content and relationship) pre-marital preparation. That is what we strive to provide.

Our advisement to you with couples who enter GCM close to their wedding date is:

1. Remain positive and upbeat about being a part of this season in their life.
2. Screen for red flags in the first meeting (if significant problems are found, see the next question).
3. If no red flags are found, stay on the normal schedule (meeting on somewhere between a 2-4 week interval).
4. Allow the post-wedding meetings to cover the subjects that were not addressed before the wedding.

2. What if we think they need to meet with a more experienced counselor? What if we think they do not need to get married... at least not in the time frame they've set?

First, you need to remember that you are an advisor. There are limits to this role. You can make wise, well-informed advisements with clear practical next steps. After that, there is not much control. That is often the hardest part for compassionate people want to be involved in a counseling-related ministry.

Second, as a church, we may decide that the issue is problematic enough that our one of our pastors cannot, in good conscience, perform the wedding ceremony. Even in this, we do not have the level of influence that can require a couple to delay or reconsider their decision to marry.

The advisements below are detailed in an intentional order which we ask our mentors to follow:

1. **Listen.** A great rule of thumb for all things counseling-related is, “*If you don't know what to say, ask more questions.*” Rest in the reality you will not be making a decision for the couple, but only a recommendation.
2. **If the concern is minor**, spend more time on that topic in your mentoring relationship. You are fully deputized to double up on one of the topics if it benefits the couple. Also, ask the couple if you can share your concern with the pastor leading their wedding ceremony. The pastor will appreciate this. That is why we recommend asking the couple to connect you with the pastor leading their wedding ceremony.⁴
3. **If the concern is moderate to severe**, you should recommend formal counseling. It is up to the couple to pursue this option. If the couple is in RDU options can be found at summitchurch.com/counseling. If the couple lives in another city, quality counselors can be found using this approach bradhambrick.com/findacounselor.
4. **If the couple does not adhere to your recommendation on a sever concern**, follow back up with the pastor leading their wedding. This is not punitive. It helps to ensure that this pastor can offer a wise word of caution and make an informed decision about whether he, in good conscience, can lead the wedding ceremony.
5. Unless your concerns involve something illegal or a safety consideration, continue to care for the couple as their mentor. Relationship is influence and, if the couple is engaging with the GCM materials, your concerns may begin to take on greater weight with the couple as they learn more of what God designed marriage to be.

4. Are there articles or books I need to be reading?

We would recommend beginning with the reading the five seminar manuals in the *Creating a Gospel-Centered Marriage* seminar series. These will expose you to a variety of Christian materials books on marriage. You're likely to find at least one author that piques your interest and you want to read more

We would also recommend the marriage conferences presented by Family Life Today (familylife.com/events).

⁴ This pastor may be at another church, often the childhood church of either the bride or groom to be. Even when this is the case, the pastor can offer another voice to help the couple assess and respond to the concerns you see.

5. What if we learn the couple is living together?

The principles from question #2 apply to this situation. Our church policy is that a Summit pastor will not perform the wedding for a couple who are living together before marriage. So, if this issue arises and a Summit pastor is unaware, please let that pastor know.

However, *we want this subject to start a conversation rather than end it*, so we have created a video to address this common issue (bradhambrick.com/cohabitation). We include this link in the purity covenant that the couple downloads and reads before your first meeting, so you won't be the first person to broach this subject with them.

If your couple is living together and doesn't understand or agree with Summit's policy:

1. Continue to meet with the couple. We want the opportunity to influence them with biblical, gospel-centered teaching as much as they will allow. You, as mentors, are one of the churches primary means of doing so.
2. Encourage them to watch the video (script below) and consider acting on the recommendations made at the end.

Cohabitation: A Conversation Starter

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.