

Marriage Packet

MARRIAGE POLICY, PREMARITAL CARE, AND WEDDING RESOURCES



“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”

GENESIS 2:18,21-25

Thank you for your interest in pursuing marriage with Downtown Cornerstone Church (DCC). We are excited to partner with you in God’s redemptive plan for your marriage. The goal of this packet is to assist you in starting premarital care and planning a wedding service through DCC.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND

- DCC’s Marriage Policy page 3
- DCC’s *Marital Preparation* (premarital) class page 5
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QUESTIONS

If you have any questions as you work through this packet, please contact: weddings@downtowncornerstone.org.

MARRIAGE POLICY

Because we are committed to building strong Christian marriages, we want to share the following guidelines and Scriptures. We have no desire to condemn or reject anyone, but we want to live within God's principles for marriage. Therefore, DCC's pastors uphold the following policies for performing a marriage ceremony:

1. We require couples to complete DCC's *Marital Preparation* class prior to any marriage.

Please note that it is *not* mandatory that the DCC pastor who officiates your wedding service also be the same pastor who conducts your premarital care. Also, if you receive premarital care from a DCC pastor but plan to have another pastor at a different church officiate the ceremony, we reserve the right to reach out to the pastor performing the wedding service with any relevant concerns. Details for the premarital class follow in this packet.

2. If a divorce has previously occurred, we will need to explore the nature of the divorce and determine if there was a biblical basis for it. *Matthew 5:31-32*

If this applies to your situation, please indicate this on your premarital registration form. A previous marriage and divorce does not necessarily exclude you from remarriage. We recognize there are a host of situations and circumstances that make each situation unique. Upon receiving your premarital registration, a DCC pastor will meet with you, hear your story, and determine if we can perform the wedding service.

3. Unfortunately, we cannot marry a couple if one person is a follower of Jesus and the other is not.

1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14

We believe that marriage is a gift from God given to all people. When men and women marry, whether they know the Giver or not, they receive this gift. Marriage unites two people into one and we believe that because of the weight of this union, Scripture commands all those who know the Lord to not marry outside the faith.

4. If a couple is unwilling to refrain from living together, or being sexually active, until they are married, then we cannot perform the wedding. *1 Corinthians 7:8*

We believe Scripture teaches about the importance of keeping the physical intimacy of sexual relations within the confines of a committed and biblical marriage. This can be a challenging discussion, and very possibly may come across as judgmental, but our heart behind this policy is to establish proper expectations of marriage before the marriage and to do so based on biblical principles. As pastors, we frequently counsel husbands and wives who struggled with this during their engagements, and who must then deal with the negative consequences within their marriages. (We have included a further exploration of the cohabitation piece at the end of this packet.)

5. If either person does not have the blessing of their parents, we will need to explore the reasons why. If parental concerns are legitimate, we will not be able to marry the couple. *Exodus 20:12*

We think Scripture is clear in its call to honor our parents. Should this be a potential issue with your current situation, please communicate this to the DCC pastor who may officiate your wedding service. The pastor will seek to understand the circumstances, recognizing that age and background may strongly impact this situation.

6. If either person is under the influence of alcohol or drugs (other than those prescribed by a doctor) before or during the rehearsal or wedding, we will not be able to marry the couple.

Romans 12:3; Ecclesiastes 5:1-5

Scripture reminds us to be sober minded and to let our “yes be yes,” and “our no be no” (Matthew 5:37). There is no greater covenant that we enter into in our life than the marriage covenant, and so we should seek to be clear-headed and sober-minded when making marriage vows.

NOTE... If you have questions about any of these six statements, we would love to sit down with you and talk through them. This is not meant to be an end to all discussion, rather we pray it may open the door for you to think through your current situation and upcoming marriage through a biblical lens you may not have previously considered.

MARITAL PREPARATION CLASS

DCC's *Marital Preparation: Laying the Groundwork for a God-Centered Marriage* (premarital) class is a 6-week study on biblical marriage that is designed to help you gain clarity in biblical understanding of the foundations and fundamental aspects of a God-centered marriage; gain clarity on your relationship; gain clarity and growth in skills for a healthy, flourishing marriage. This class is required if you wish to have a DCC pastor officiate your wedding service.

The following is a general outline of our premarital class. We provide this so that you are aware of topics covered and so you know what is expected.

BEFORE FIRST CLASS

- Right away...
 - Read as far as you can through *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim & Kathy Keller prior to class. It sets a strong biblical foundation and gives a broad overview for marriage — some of which we will not directly cover.
 - Finish the Pre-Assignment: *Marriage Preparation Inventory*
- Prior to the first class together...
 - Read *Pre-Engagement: 5 Questions to Ask Yourself* (booklet) & Chapter 1 in *Love that Lasts*
 - Finish and discuss: Assignment #1: *Expectations, Goals & Oneness*; Assignment #2: *Jesus-Centered Marriage*

WEEK	READ & DISCUSS	ASSIGNMENT
Week #1	Chapter 1, Foundations	#1 <i>Expectations, Goals & Oneness</i> #2 <i>Jesus-Centered Marriage</i>
Week #2	Chapter 2, Role of Husband	#3 Piper Reading & Discussion
Week #3	Chapter 3, Role of Wife	#4 <i>Love Quotient</i> Exercise #5 <i>How Do You Say "I Love You"?</i> Exercise
Week #4	Chapters 4-5, Communication	#6 <i>Are You Listening?</i> Inventory #7 <i>Biblical Communication</i> Evaluation
Week #5	Chapter 6, Conflict Resolution	#8 <i>Understanding & Resolving Conflict</i> Exercise #9 <i>Finances & Budgeting</i> Worksheet
Week #6	Chapters 7-8, Romance & Intimacy	#10 <i>Marital Intimacy True or False</i> Quiz

REQUIRED READING

- *Love that Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace*, by Gary & Betsy Ricucci (This will be our main text)
- *Marriage & the Family: Biblical Essentials*, Andreas Kostenberger (Read as supporting material)
- *Pre-Engagement: 5 Questions to Ask Yourself* (Booklet), by David Powlison & John Yenchko
- *Intended for Pleasure*, by Ed & Gaye Wheat (Be reading throughout; especially for Week #6)
- *What's Wrong with a Little Porn When You're Married?* (Booklet), by R. Nicholas Black (Be reading throughout; especially for Week #6)

REGISTRATION

To register for an upcoming *Marital Preparation* class, please visit: www.downtowncornerstone.org/premarital.

PERSPECTIVE ON MARRIAGE AND WEDDINGS

DCC believes that marriage is the union created by God between one man and one woman in order to glorify God through community, reliance, and the provision of the future through children. Christian marriage should be between two believers. It is intended to be a life-long commitment, as the couple follows Jesus together.

Marriage can be a wonderful and deeply satisfying commitment, yet a great marriage does not simply happen. It requires much intentional effort, including willingness from both parties to work at fostering intimacy, nurture, and care. The foundation of Christian marriage is the love of God as expressed through Jesus Christ. The relationship of Christ and the church is emblematic of marriage. His pursuit of, provision for, and purification of His church are seen in the Bible as parallel to marriage between a husband and wife. We learn about the joys and even struggles of life-giving love that ultimately comes from God. Faith in, and openness to, God strengthens a couple's marriage.

PLANNING THE WEDDING

A Christian wedding is a worship gathering and a time of great excitement and joy, as two people express the solemn commitment that underscores a very special relationship. Through the use of ritual, the Christian wedding service gives expression to the love, respect, and lifelong commitment between two persons who desire to express their commitment in such a way before family, friends, and God. The following policies and guidelines are designed to enhance communication between the couple, the wedding coordinator/planner, and the church staff. We truly want you to have a wonderful and meaningful wedding.

A WEDDING AS A WORSHIP GATHERING

Since the wedding is a worship gathering, all details concerning the wedding and related arrangements should conform to such practices and standards of good taste that are consistent with the Christian faith and DCC. As you plan and organize your wedding, it is important to keep your officiant properly informed and to make your plans as early as possible. We are open to celebrating weddings in a variety of ways as long as approved by the officiant in advance. A sample wedding flow, along with possible components we have regularly included in wedding ceremonies, is found in this document.

PASTORAL AND STAFF HONORARIA

Please know that pastors and staff of DCC celebrate your decision to covenant before God. No one with DCC intends to make money from your celebration. We love being a part of wedding ceremonies for people in the church, and an honorarium simply recognizes the time, energy and expense to those involved. In many cases, in addition to investing a notable amount of their time over the course of your premarital sessions and wedding service planning, the officiating pastors are missing the bulk of their weekend that would normally be spent with their own families to be with yours.

The suggested honorarium ranges from \$250 to \$500, plus any additional travel costs (i.e., travel outside of Seattle, ferry costs or lodging). Honorarium checks should be made out directly to the pastor involved (not to DCC). If

these suggested fees will be a severe hardship, please let us know and we can come alongside you to determine a more feasible amount. To help determine the extent of the hardship, we may ask for additional information about your wedding expenses, and offer financial counsel on wedding budgeting if you so desire.

WEDDING COORDINATOR/PLANNER

We strongly recommend that you retain the services of a wedding coordinator/planner. This person often serves as a liaison, a guiding hand, and a reference book for the couple concerning the wedding ceremony. You should find someone (this can be either a professional or a family/friend who volunteers in this capacity) whom you feel confident will be able to handle the ceremony with graciousness and ease due to their organizational skills, experience, and desire to serve. If you are having your wedding at DCC, you will be assigned a DCC wedding coordinator.

Please know that officiants of DCC do not act as wedding coordinators/planners, and therefore we cannot overstate our encouragement to have someone perform this role for you. If you need assistance finding a rehearsal and wedding coordinator/planner, please email weddings@downtowncornerstone.org.

MUSIC

A wedding ceremony should celebrate God's goodness to the human family and lift our love and gratitude to God. Music is often a celebratory component of the wedding service. Music should be selected for suitability to a worship gathering of praise and thanksgiving. The music should seek to convey the message that in a Christian marriage ceremony, the bride and groom stand there not simply as a couple, but as a couple before God. It is meant to be sacred, exhilarating, and a uniquely memorable event.

If you are interested in asking musicians of DCC to participate in your ceremony, or if you are interested in using instruments and sound equipment of DCC, you must make the request and coordinate this in advance. Please know that musicians of DCC are not employees, and therefore if you choose to ask DCC musicians to participate in your wedding, you should expect to compensate them for their time and travel, in addition to the pastoral honoraria.

REHEARSAL

A rehearsal for a wedding is essential and attendance at the wedding rehearsal is mandatory for all members of the wedding party, including parents of the couple and any readers, soloists or additional musicians. Usually, a rehearsal occurs the night preceding the wedding or at a time most convenient for all parties involved. You should communicate the date and time of the rehearsal to your officiant.

The rehearsal should start promptly at the stated time and should be organized and run by your wedding coordinator/planner. Please keep in mind that some participants may have to travel from work, so we advise not scheduling a rehearsal too early in the evening. Please respect everyone's time by communicating very clearly to all participants the start time. The rehearsal will begin no later than 15 minutes after the planned start time. Your

wedding coordinator/planner should expect to lead the rehearsal with some assistance from the officiant pastor at appropriate times.

During this rehearsal, expect to practice the processional and recessional with the corresponding music, and become familiar with the venue and its amenities. Soloists or readings will be practiced at the discretion of the couple and the comfort level of the person performing his or her assigned part. Know that the wedding vows, the teaching, and other personal pieces will not be practiced during the rehearsal so as to not take away from the actual wedding ceremony.

The marriage license, which is obtained by the engaged couple prior to the rehearsal, should be given to the wedding coordinator/planner at the rehearsal.

ALCOHOL/DRUG POLICY

Prior to the rehearsal and wedding ceremony, it is expected that all members of the wedding party will refrain from the use of drugs and alcoholic beverages. The couple is under obligation to make this policy known to other members of the wedding party. The reason for this expectation is that most problems experienced at weddings are alcohol and/or drug related.

WEDDINGS AT DCC'S BUILDING

All couples who wish to use DCC's facilities must abide by all rules and regulations set out below:

- All weddings held at the DCC's building must be performed by a DCC pastor. In order to be married by a DCC pastor, you must complete DCC's *Marital Preparation* (premarital) class.
- All wedding dates must be reserved through our staff. Request of the facility does not guarantee availability.
- No weddings may be scheduled on Sundays.
- DCC's building may only be used for the wedding service. All reception activities must take place off site.
- A 50% deposit of total rental fees is required to hold the reservation. The remainder of rental fees are due one week before the wedding day.
- Any additional fees should be given to the staff coordinator at or before the wedding rehearsal to be distributed the day of the wedding ceremony.

RENTAL COSTS AND PERSONNEL FEES

There is a base rental fee of \$600 for the use of the auditorium, which covers both the rehearsal (up to 2 hours) and the wedding ceremony (up to 5 hours). The base fee also includes use of one room in the children's area for bridal preparation and use of the conference room for groomsmen. These areas are available for up to 5 hours on the day of the wedding. This base fee also covers the employment of DCC's facility lead to be present on-site and a production technician to run sound, video, and lights. A discount is available to covenant members of DCC.

A \$200 cleaning deposit is required, which will be fully refunded if the auditorium and all wedding party spaces used are returned to in a clean condition. If these conditions are not met, the deposit will not be returned and will be used to cover the cost of cleaning and preparing the space for worship.

If you would like to provide parking for your guests on your wedding day, you have the option to reserve the two lots located next to DCC's building. The lots provide up to 60 spaces at a cost of \$200. At your request, DCC will manage the reservation of the lots. Lot reservation is available for the wedding service only (not for the rehearsal).

Summary of fees:

- \$600 base rental fee for facility use and staffing (discount available for DCC members)
- \$200 refundable cleaning deposit (required)
- \$200 parking lot rental fee, up to 60 spaces available (optional)

DECORATIONS AND FOOD

- DCC's staff must approve all wedding decorations.
- Absolutely no thumbtacks, nails, or any type of hanger that leaves holes in walls or ceilings may be used in decorating the building.
- Confetti and rice are prohibited for exit from the building; birdseed and bubbles are acceptable alternatives.
- No alcohol may be served or consumed on the premises at any time.

INSURANCE

Non-members of DCC must secure a liability rider of \$1 million per occurrence, with a \$5 million general liability umbrella. This documentation must be attached to the signed agreement. You may obtain this “one day” policy by speaking with your insurance agent or researching policies available on the internet. DCC requires evidence of this coverage mailed or emailed to us no later than one month prior to the wedding date.

CANCELLATIONS

- Cancellations made 30 days or more prior to the wedding will receive a full rental facility deposit refund, minus 20% of the deposit. No payments will be required for the pastor, sound technician, or wedding coordinator. The cleaning deposit will be refunded in full.
- Cancellations made 30 days or less prior to the wedding will receive a full rental facility deposit refund, minus 25% of the deposit. No payments will be required for the pastor, sound technician, or wedding coordinator. The cleaning deposit will be refunded in full.
- Cancellations made within 1 week of the wedding will receive a full rental facility deposit refund, minus 30% of the total rental cost. No payments will be required for the pastor, sound technician, or wedding coordinator. The cleaning deposit will be refunded in full.

TO REQUEST USE OF DCC'S BUILDING

To request use of DCC's building, please visit www.downtowncornerstone.org/weddings, and complete the Space Use Reservation form.

SAMPLE WEDDING CEREMONY

The following is a suggested wedding ceremony format given simply to help you organize your thoughts and give you a standard wedding service format as a starting point. It is intended to help you begin planning a ceremony that authentically speaks to your life as a couple and your unity in Christ.

WEDDING FORMAT

Prelude music

Candle lighting*

Seating of grandparents

Seating of the mothers

Entry of the groom's party

Processional

Entry of the bride

Giving of the bride

Word of welcome

Opening prayer

Scripture reading(s)

Message on the meaning of a Christian marriage

Charge to the couple

Charge to family & friends

Exchange of vows

Exchange of rings

Vocal or instrumental*

Communion*

Unity candle*

Prayer for the new couple

Pronouncement of marriage, wedding kiss and presentation of the couple

Announcement of reception and dismissal procedures postlude

Recessional

* = optional elements

SAMPLE WEDDING VOWS

In the presence of God Almighty, two people publicly confess their love for and their commitment to one another in the form of a wedding vow. This covenantal promise is a very important piece of your upcoming life together.

We encourage you to take this seriously and avoid any flippant words that would diminish the seriousness of the vows you make. The following are examples of wedding vows, including the traditional ones. You are welcome to use, alter, or write your own instead.

1. I, _____, take you, _____ to be my lawful wedded _____ [husband or wife], to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.
2. _____, I take you to be my true and lawful wife. And God helping me, I will love you, I will cherish you, I will honor you, and I will protect you from all others...in sickness and in health, in poverty or riches, for better or for worse. I will cleave only to you until God by death shall separate us.
_____, I take you to be my true and lawful husband. And God helping me, I will love you, I will cherish you, I will honor you, and I will protect you from all others...in sickness and in health, in poverty or riches, for better or for worse. I will cleave only to you until God by death shall separate us.
3. I _____, take you _____ to be my wife I will honor you above every other family relationship. I commit myself to you as to no other to love you as Christ loves the Church, to provide for you, to care for you, as best I can, whether times are easy, or whether they are difficult. I will live with you graciously as my co-heir in Jesus Christ Until Jesus comes, or until God by death, shall separate us.
I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband. I will honor you above every other family relationship. I commit myself to you as to no other to submit to you out of my reverence for Christ, to help you, to care for you, whether times are easy, or whether they are difficult. I will live with you graciously as my co-heir in Jesus Christ Until Jesus comes, or until God by death, shall separate us.
4. _____, I vow to love you just like (Christ) Jesus loved the church. I'll give myself up for you in order to sanctify or set you apart for the abundant life that Jesus designed for you. _____, I will love you as I love my own body and I'll cherish you. I'll nourish you, protect you and provide for you. _____, I realize my leadership responsibilities, and with God's leadership and help I will honor you, treat you as precious and minister to you, being sensitive to your special feminine needs. I will take initiative to insure the sun never goes down on any anger between us. I commit myself to you in the Lord and divorce is not even an option. I will consider this union as permanent, from this day forward.
_____, created by God as your glory, equal helper and complement, I vow out of love and fear of Christ, to be loyal and submissive to you. I will never forsake you for as long as we both live. The Bible tells me that a good wife is quiet and gentle in spirit, reverent in behavior, sensible, pure, kind and a worker at home. _____, I vow to allow God's grace to help me become all these things for you. And, _____, the Bible also says that, as your wife, I am to love you. I love you _____, and I promise today to always love you through all trials, tribulations and joys.

5. I _____, take you _____, my friend, my love, to be my wedded wife and to love and cherish you with all I have and all of whom I am. I will forsake all others to be one with you, to share life's challenges, sorrows and joys and grow with you in the grace of our God. I give my life to you, to serve you and to serve our God with you. I will love you as Christ loves the church. I choose to be your husband until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, or until God, by death shall separate us - and so, I give you my pledge. I love you.
- I _____, take you, _____, my friend, my love, to be my wedded husband. I choose you to be second only to the Lord in my heart and life: submitting to you as unto Him. I give you all of who I am, who I have been and who I will be, to be one with you, to love, comfort, honor and obey you...to serve and to serve with you. I choose to be your wife, forsaking all others until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, or until God, by death shall separate us. And so, I give you my pledge. Where you go I will go - where you stay I will stay - your people will be my people and your God, my God. I love you.
6. _____, you are the greatest blessing that God has ever given me. I believe that it is His perfect will, He has brought us together in order to complete each other. _____ I love you and need you, and before God and all these people here I pledge myself to you. I promise to love you in an understanding way, as Christ loves the church. _____ I truly commit myself to care for, to protect, to honor and to love you no matter what the circumstances might be.
7. _____, I commit myself to you, to be your husband, to serve you, to protect you and give my love to you as to no other. I accept the responsibility given to me to love you as Christ loves the church with the humility and strength He supplies. I will love you when times are good and when times are difficult. I promise to seek God always in our relationship so as to be the leader He wants me to be. I love you _____, and I praise our Lord for giving you to be my wife.
- _____, I love you. God has created me to be a helper to you. I will be by your side as your companion, lover, and friend in all situations. I will serve you and respect you; supporting you in your efforts to grow as a husband, a professional, and as a Christian. I commit myself to you and to our life together.
8. _____, before God and these people here, I commit myself to you as to no other, for the rest of my life. All that I have, and all that I am, I give to you from this day on. _____, know in your heart and in your mind, that my love for you is not blown back and forth by the winds of change. I have chosen to love you unconditionally as Christ chose to love the church, this decision is based on an uncompromising commitment. I understand fully that only in this committed relationship will our love grow. God is my reason for living and by His grace we will share life's challenges, sorrows, and joys until death does separate us.
9. Before my God, my family and the friends that have come to share in our celebration, I _____, commit myself to you, _____, in the deepest, most intimate relationship that two people can enter into: the covenant of marriage. I have grown to love you _____, and I am excited and at the same time fulfilled, knowing that you will be my wife, and that we shall share the remainder of our lives together. For I have seen you in a capacity to give that I have rarely seen in others, an ability to give of yourself, your time, your love, while you ask so little in return. I am often taken back and humbled by your unselfishness, and I am immensely grateful to be given a woman of your character and quality as my life partner. I vow to be faithful to you, _____ not only in fidelity,

but also in my responsibility to meet your needs as a provider, a spiritual leader, a lover and a friend. I realize that marriage is the most challenging of all relationships for with intimacy also comes it companion difficulty, yet, I promise one thing _____ I will work at our relationship, I will not give up because genuine love never quits halfway and I love you.

10. _____, beside sending His Son to die for my sins, you are the greatest blessing that God has ever given to me. He knows our strengths and weaknesses much better than we do, and I firmly believe that He has brought us together to make each other more complete. I love you and need you, and before God and all these people I pledge myself to you. I commit myself to care for, protect, and honor you no matter what, until God separates us by death, or until His second coming. I will love you as Christ loves the church, in an unconditional and selfish way. _____, my dearest friend and my partner, besides my relationship with God, I will treasure nothing more than you.
11. _____, I commit myself to you, I will love and honor you. I will submit to you as Christ would have me - as the church is to submit to Him. I will walk alongside of you, encourage you, support you and pray for you. I am thankful for our friendship and for the love God has blessed us with. I am looking forward to spending my life with you through both good times and bad. I promise to stand beside you. I pledge my faithfulness and my life to you. I love you.
12. _____, I thank God that you are one of “these things” Jesus referred to when He said “seek ye first.” You’re a precious gift from the Father, and I’m very grateful for your love and friendship. I will always strive to take care of His gift to me by loving you with all my being and respecting you as God has commanded me. My best friend, I want to encourage your heart and uplift your spirit as we share our life together. I promise to follow your leadership as well as support all you do and choose for the two of us, knowing that you desire, consider and value my views. I’m overjoyed that with God’s help, our marriage will be a clear representation of the relationship between God and His people. All that I am and all that I have I give to you, until God separates us by death or until we are gathered at His second coming.

SAMPLE RING VOWS

1. With this ring, I thee wed. With my body, I thee worship. With all my worldly goods I thee endow. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.
2. “With this ring, I thee wed. I pledge all that I am, and all that I have; to love, honor, and serve you, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
3. I _____, give this ring to you _____, as an outward symbol of my commitment to you. It means I am yours and yours alone. I want all to know that before God and these people, I gave myself to you.

POSSIBLE SCRIPTURE FOR WEDDINGS

OLD TESTAMENT

- Genesis 1:26-31
- Genesis 2:18-25
- Psalm 127:1, 3
- Song of Solomon 8:6-7
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

NEW TESTAMENT

The following texts directly address marriage

- Matthew 19:3-12
- Mark 10:6-9
- Ephesians 5:21-33
- Colossians 3:18-19
- 1 Peter 3:1-7
- Revelation 19:5-9

The following texts encourage love for God and for one another

- Matthew 22:35-40
- Romans 12:9-10
- 1 Corinthians 13:1-3
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- Colossians 3:12-17
- 1 John 4:7-12

THE DANGEROUS LURE OF LIVING TOGETHER BEFORE MARRIAGE

By Steve Hoppe¹

75%

According to a recent article published by NBC News², 75% of women ages 15-44 have lived with a boyfriend before turning 30. Seventy. Five. Percent. I trust the number is similar for men.

Sadly, in my experience doing premarital counseling for hundreds of Christian couples, I have found the percentage isn't much lower for professing believers.

Why is this the case? Why are so many unwed Christians living under the same roof? Why has premarital cohabitation become the new norm in the Church? There are at least three reasons.

WHY CHRISTIAN COUPLES COHABITATE

It Makes Logical Sense

I'll admit that living together before marriage makes sense — at least from an in-the-moment human perspective. It provides a greater body of data for evaluating if this is “the one.” It saves money as couples typically split rent, groceries, and basic apartment necessities. It eliminates the dreaded midnight drive home after a stay-in date night. It allows a couple to grow exponentially closer as they do life side by side. It provides these and many other benefits. It makes logical sense — from a shortsighted human vantage point.

Society Celebrates It

Second, premarital cohabitation has become common in the Church because many Christians have made today's secular values their own. Our society cherishes “trying before buying,” convenience at any cost, sex without rules, companionship without commitment, and relationship without responsibility — everything premarital cohabitation provides. Instead of questioning such values — if not downright opposing them — countless Christians have adopted them. It's no wonder so many of them are living together before tying the knot.

Church Leaders Ignore It

Finally, premarital cohabitation has become commonplace in the Church because Christian leaders have been relatively silent on the issue. Pastors hint that they disapprove of couples living together during premarital counseling, but they still joyfully officiate their weddings. Small group leaders know they should confront their cohabitating members, but they turn a blind eye because they feel they lack the relational capital needed to address such a “personal issue.” Mature Christian friends and family members — even godly parents — don't want to rock relational boats, so they sweep their loved ones' sinful lifestyles under the rug. For a range of reasons, most of

¹ Hoppe, Steve (2018, August 31). “The Dangerous Lure of Living Together Before Marriage”. Biblical Counseling Coalition; accessed 2018, November 14. <https://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2018/08/31/the-dangerous-lure-of-living-together-before-marriage/>

² Jonel Aleccia, “‘The new normal’: Cohabitation on the rise, study finds,” NBC News, April 4, 2013, <https://www.nbcnews.com/healthmain/new-normal-cohabitation-rise-study-finds-1C9208429>.

which are rooted in fear, church leaders are ignoring the proverbial elephant in the room and allowing unwed couples to bunk up.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF COHABITATION

Predictably, this growing phenomenon of premarital cohabitation comes with a plethora of negative consequences. Here is just a handful:

The Dreaded Breakup

Let's just say that a cohabitating couple breaks up. By living together, they will have created a bond so strong that it can only be severed with a heart-slicing knife, resulting in intense — sometimes lifelong — pain for both partners. Furthermore, should either partner later get married to somebody else, their spouse will experience the pain of knowing they're the 2nd/3rd/4th/5th person on their spouse's list of live-in partners.

The Fear Factor

Premarital cohabitation puts a couple in a vulnerable situation. On the one hand, each person is giving their mind, body, emotions, material possessions, time, and living space to their boyfriend or girlfriend. On the other hand, they have absolutely no assurance that the person will stay in the relationship long-term. This creates an unspoken and often suppressed environment of insecurity and fear.

Setting the Bar Too High

When a couple is living together before marriage, they're their best selves. They stay in shape. They cook, clean, and take out the trash without being asked. They selflessly "serve" each other between the sheets. Why? They want to impress each other. The problem with this? Let's say they get married. Once they walk down the aisle, they'll no longer need to impress each other. So they'll take their feet off the gas and let themselves go. The result? Disillusionment. Marriage (and sex, in particular) will fall flat compared to the exciting yet unrealistic days when they lived together before their wedding day.

Just another Monday

Perhaps the saddest thing a recently-married couple told me was this: "Because we lived together before marriage, the day we got back from our honeymoon felt like 'just another Monday.'" Premarital cohabitation sucks the novelty, joy, and surreal feeling out of the weeks, months, and years following the big day. Nothing's really new except the jewelry on your fingers.

The Real Tragedy

But the biggest tragedy for cohabitating Christian couples is that they're living outside of God's will. According to Genesis 2:24, when a couple gets married, they become one flesh. The order is important here. First, they get married. Then they become one flesh. Premarital cohabitation, however, either reverses this order or eliminates the marriage component altogether. This isn't God's design. It isn't His will. In fact, it's sin. And nothing good ultimately happens when we live in sin.

But There's Hope

Most people think that a cohabitating couple is on a moving train that can't stop. Wrong. By God's grace, I've been able to convince many Christian couples to do the unthinkable — to move out. Yes, it's terribly inconvenient. Yes, it's expensive. Yes, it makes no sense whatsoever to the unbelieving world. But I've seen faithful followers of Jesus take this beautiful step of obedience, and not one has regretted it. Not. One. Those who eventually broke up experienced far less pain following the breakup. Those who got married rejoiced on their wedding day as they experienced a redeemed sense of novelty and wonder.

My Charge

Pastors, counselors, and fellow believers — will you do the hard thing? Will you graciously, gently, and lovingly encourage unmarried cohabitating Christian couples to stop living together? Will you confront your fears of losing their approval and speak truth into their lives? It will be hard. It will be awkward. It might ruffle their feathers. But it will be a true demonstration of love.

And if you're living with your significant other and you're not married, may I gently and lovingly encourage you to move out?

I promise you won't regret it.