

## The Seven Myths of Cohabitation

by Patrick & Dwaina Six

Cohabitation is nothing new. It happened in Biblical times, too. Remember when Jesus spoke with the woman at the well in John 4:17? When questioned about her husband, she answered that she had no husband. A popular contemporary Bible version renders Jesus' response as, "That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough." (John 4:17 *The Message*) Jesus didn't avoid the issue. He didn't excuse it. The woman in John 4 obviously had had a bad experience in marriage (since she'd been married five times) and she was surely experiencing emotional pain because of it. Jesus didn't scorn her or berate her. He simply addressed the truth of the situation and moved directly to her real need.

Cohabitation was out of favor with the general American public for many years – in fact, it was called “shacking up” just a few decades ago. However, in recent years, it has resurfaced and grown into a socially accepted lifestyle in many ways. This is contrary to God's Word. It is morally wrong to live together outside of marriage. Scripture teaches that God designed sexual intimacy for marriage and that we should all “abstain from... sexual immorality” (Acts 15:20).

You're probably asking, “What does this have to do with me? I'm married!” The Bible admonishes us that “Marriage should be held in honor among ALL.” (Hebrews 13:4) So we need to know how to honor marriage by speaking truth into situations we encounter. We think it is helpful to be aware of commonly-held myths of cohabitation, to be able to discuss them,

and to present truth to our friends, family members, co-workers and yes, fellow church members.

The first myth says, “*By living together, we can see how we'll get along when we're married.*” Heard this one? It's not true. Couples who live together outside of marriage are generally less favorable of marriage and more accepting of divorce. They tend to act more like dating partners or roommates than a husband and wife. They typically maintain separate finances, schedules, and lifestyles. They usually don't feel an obligation to “check with their mate” before making major decisions. Married couples, on the other hand, rely on each other more and are less likely to walk out because they've made a permanent commitment to each other. **Living together does**

***Our children will be better off - NOT true!***

**not accurately imitate a married relationship.**

The second myth is: “*But we are committed to each other — that's why we're moving in!*” Living together is not commitment — it is expecting the relationship to end and providing an “easy way out” when it does end! Commitment is more than just sharing living space. It's a deep and lasting bond that says, “No matter what, I'm sticking with you.” If a couple were truly committed to each other for the long haul, why wouldn't they make it official? **Those who are really committed are willing to show it by going for that “piece of paper”: a marriage license.**

Many individuals, who've gone through a divorce either personally or as a child of divorced parents, want to avoid divorce at all costs because of the pain they experienced. So we can understand why they mistakenly subscribe to the third myth: “*We'll be less likely to end up in divorce court.*” But this is accurate only when you consider the 40 percent of live-ins who never marry! If they never get married then they don't end up in divorce court. But, if they break up, they still experience an “emotional divorce”. AND, those who do get married face a 50 percent higher rate of divorce than married couples who didn't live together first. If you really want your relationship to last, why increase your risks that it won't? **In short, if you want to lessen the chance of divorce, don't live together until you're married!**

“*But we'll be happier. And we won't feel tied down.*” This myth sounds altruistic but is actually rather self-centered. While it's true that marriage itself isn't a guarantee of bliss, it's also true that couples who live together are, on average, far less happy than married couples. In fact, an article called “The Link Between Past and Present Intimate Relationships”, printed in the *Journal of Family Issues*, shows that married couples have fewer disagreements than couples who live together. The marriage commitment results in both partners giving to each other in a more complete and unreserved way. Research also shows that the security of commitment in marriage offers better sexual and emotional fulfillment. So, **the truth is: living together does not make a couple happier.**

## Myths (con't)

Another myth is: “*Our children will be better off.*” Not true! The safest place for children is in a home where their parents are married to each other. Abuse rates are highest among children with cohabitating parents. The best probability for experiencing a great relationship and providing a nurturing environment for children occurs within the commitment of marriage. Most children worry at some time in their life about their parents getting a divorce. They need the reassurance that their parents love each other and are committed to the marriage and family. **The underlying lack of commitment in a cohabitating relationship lends itself, by its nature, to feeding this insecurity in children.**

“*But we’re married in our own eyes.*” No, they’re not. These couples have specifically decided *not* to marry yet or they would get married. **Jesus made a distinction (in John 4:17) between marriage and cohabitation and we should, too.**

The seventh myth is that “*We should live together before getting married to see if we’re compatible.*” People who use this argument also use

another one you’ve probably heard: “You wouldn’t buy a car without test-driving it first, would you?” Do you catch how that dehumanizes the other person? If you decide not to purchase a car, the vehicle doesn’t feel rejected! The car doesn’t need psychological counseling so it can trust the next driver, does it? You don’t pack your personal luggage in the trunk of a car you’re only test-driving. And deciding not to purchase a car doesn’t bring emotional baggage into your next test-driving experience. This kind of reasoning leaves an “easy way” out of a relationship. **The truth is that every couple is “incompatible”!** That’s part of God’s purpose in marriage: that we consider one another as more important than ourselves (see Philippians 2:4). We must all learn to be compatible with our mate!

### ***The Bottom Line***

**By living with a boyfriend/ girlfriend outside of marriage, an individual is not only living in contradiction to God’s will, but is also placing their future marriage in danger.**

What’s the ingredient that holds a marriage together? A common commitment of selfless love. This is absent in cohabiting relationships. People who live together place a higher value on autonomy than commitment. Married couples, however, have made a commitment to stay together through the good and the bad and place a higher value on the relationship than self.

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Yes, cohabitation without the commitment of marriage seems to be rampant. Our family, friends, co-workers and others are sometimes accepting and resigned to the current trend. However, we need to heed the admonition: “Don’t be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think.” (Romans 12:2 CEV) **Be prepared to lovingly encourage others to not settle for less than what God desires.**

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