



Ron Moore

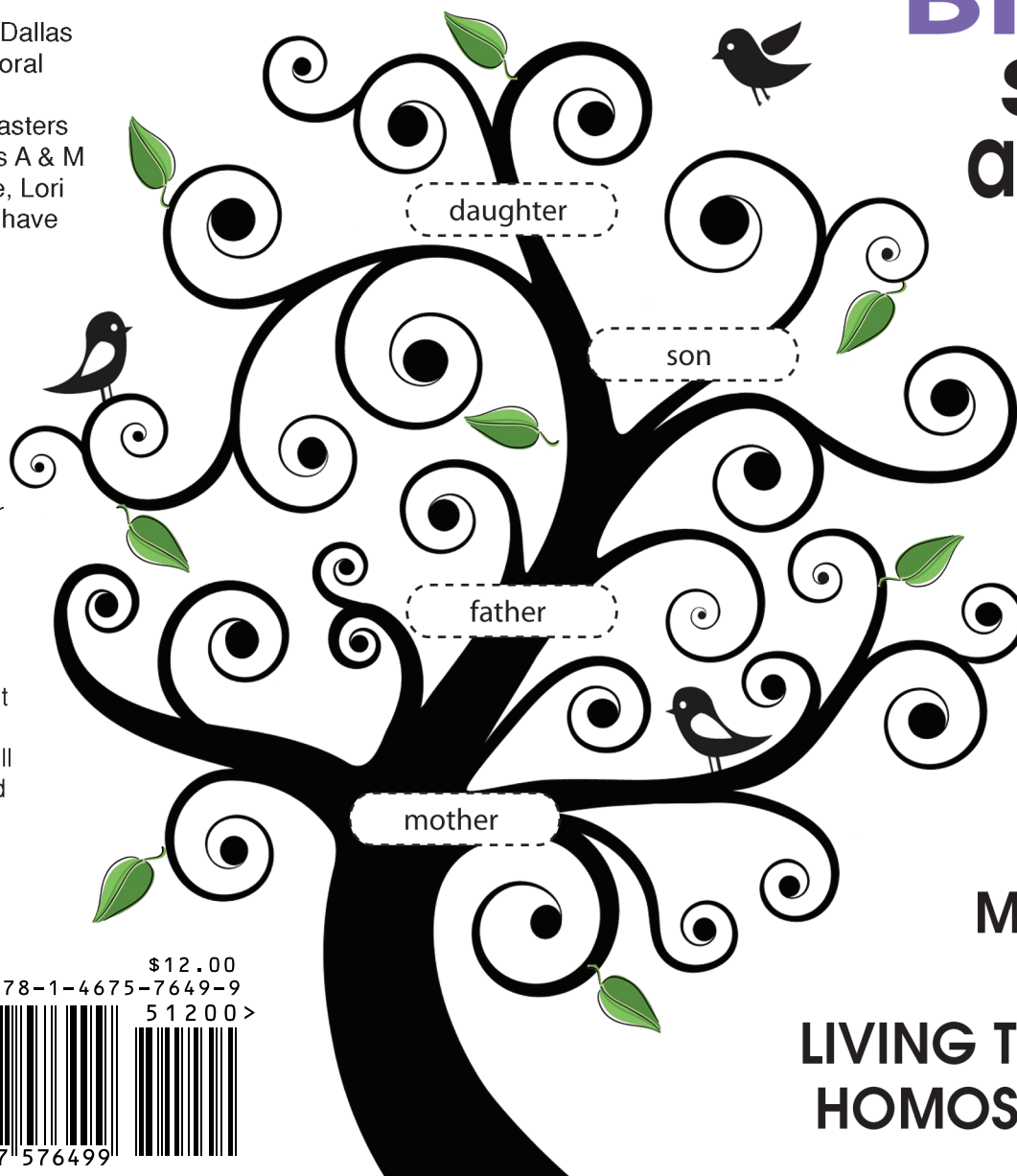
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THE FIGHT IS ON FOR BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

The cultural norm used to be a man and a woman getting married, having a family and living happily ever after. That standard is long gone. Today in the United States fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. Many couples in our country have come to the conclusion that living together before marriage makes good sense. Americans are deeply divided over the issue of homosexuality and the approval of same-sex marriage.

The fight is on for biblical marriage, but citing statistics is not enough. We need to understand what the Bible has to say. Once these truths are settled in our hearts and minds we will have the confidence to pass these truths to our children and grandchildren.

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says
about...

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THE JOURNEY™
with Ron Moore



what the BIBLE says about...

**MARRIAGE, DIVORCE,
LIVING TOGETHER
AND HOMOSEXUALITY**

Ron Moore

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THE
JOURNEY[™]
with Ron Moore

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
The Purpose of this Book	8
<i>CHAPTER ONE: God's Design and Desire for Marriage</i>	<i>11</i>
Leaving Mom and Dad	14
United to Each Other	15
Oneness	16
<i>CHAPTER TWO: What God has Joined Together.....</i>	<i>18</i>
God's Word on Commitment	24
Understanding Commitment.....	26
The Long-Term View	29
Is Divorce Ever a Biblical Option?	34
<i>CHAPTER THREE: Living Together... Test Drive</i>	<i>38</i>
Why Couples Choose to Live Together Before Marriage	39
The Revealing Statistics of Living Together.....	42
The Biblical Love Package	43
Why Living Together Doesn't Work	49
Whew! They Finally Got Married	51
<i>CHAPTER FOUR: Homosexuality and Gay Marriage.....</i>	<i>52</i>
God's Word on Sexuality	55
Genesis 3	58
For Those Who Struggle with Homosexuality	60
How Should Believers Respond to Homosexuality?	62
A Note to Parents	67



INTRODUCTION



THE FIGHT IS ON FOR BIBLICAL MARRIAGE

The fight is on for biblical marriage. The cultural norm used to be a man and a woman getting married, having a family and living happily ever after. That standard is long gone.

Today in the United States fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce. Every time a person says “I do” again, the chances of them saying “I’m done” increases. Sixty percent of second marriages and seventy percent of third marriages end in divorce.

Many couples in our country have come to the conclusion that living together before marriage makes good sense. They don’t oppose marriage. Nine out of ten people who live together say they want to get married eventually. First, they feel a test drive is in order. Who would buy a car without taking it for a spin? Who would buy a house without inspecting it thoroughly? Who would get married without ensuring compatibility first? It is estimated that one half of all couples getting married for the

first time will have lived together before making it “official.”¹

Today Americans are deeply divided over the issue of homosexuality and the approval of same-sex marriage. According to the Pew Research Center, only 12 years ago fifty-seven percent of Americans opposed gay marriage. Today, the opposition has dropped to forty-three percent.² Not surprisingly, the majority of Americans born after 1980 favor same-sex marriage.³

The fight is on for biblical marriage, but citing statistics is not enough. We need to understand what the Bible has to say. Once these truths are settled in our hearts and minds we will have the confidence to pass them to our children and grandchildren.



¹ *Modern Sex*, p. 9

² When Gallup started polling this issue in 1996, sixty-eight percent said “no” and twenty-seven percent said “yes” to gay marriage. Today, Gallup polling shows that fifty percent approve while forty-eight percent disapprove.

³ Americans born after 1980 who approve same-sex marriage:
Fox News Poll—68%. Gallup Poll—73%. Pew Research Center—64%.



THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK



The purpose of this book is to build a biblical framework for marriage and consider three things in our culture that threaten God's design.

We will start by considering what God has to say regarding the marriage relationship. Marriage, after all, is his idea. We need to take a hard look at the Architect's blueprint if we want our relationships to stand.

Once we determine God's intention for marriage we will consider the cultural trends that threaten his design. First, we will consider the consequences divorce has on couples and their children. *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* by Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee is a landmark study that offers some revealing and troubling data. I will give an alternative to divorce that calls for a return to a biblical understanding of the "for better, for worse . . . until death do us part" vow.

Second, we will evaluate the growing trend of living together before marriage. It is important to learn why couples choose this route and what the choice does to their long-term

chances of staying together. Interestingly, some couples live together out of respect for marriage. In her blog titled *Five (Secular) Reasons Not to Live Together Before Marriage*, Jennifer Fulwiler wrote, “‘I never want to get divorced,’ one friend told me as she moved her belongings into her boyfriend’s apartment, ‘so it’s important to me to make sure we can really work together before going through with a wedding.’”⁴

Third, we will consider what the Bible says about homosexuality. My purpose is not to bash those who struggle in this area. As you will see, this issue is very personal to me as it is for many people. A few years ago, I spoke at a missionary conference on biblical sexuality. My talk on homosexuality resonated with everyone in the room. Each person had a friend, brother, sister, son or daughter who was gay. What does the Bible say about this issue and how should believers respond?

There is one thing I want to make clear before we start. The “threats” to marriage are not statistics. Behind every number is a person with questions, confusion and pain. Every statistic includes people we know and love. ***This is not a book about condemnation, but encouragement. This is an invitation to understand the path God has set before us and follow hard after him.***

⁴ www.ncregister.com/blog/jennifer-fulwiler/5-secular-reasons-not-to-live-together-before-marriage

CHAPTER ONE



GOD'S DESIGN AND DESIRE FOR MARRIAGE

Marriage is God's idea. He is the Architect and Designer of this foundational relationship that unites a man and a woman and forms the basic building blocks of culture. Together a man and woman can do what they can never do alone. In fact, being alone was the very first problem that God addressed.

The story of creation is recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis. Throughout the account everything that God made was good. However, as he looked over his magnificent creation, God saw something that did not meet his approval. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ⁵

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was

⁵ Genesis 2:18

taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:20-25

God took “one of the man’s ribs.” A better translation of this verse is “He took from his side” or “He took part of his side.” God did not create the woman from the dust as he did the man. He did not make a new and different species. Everything he invested in the man was now invested in the woman.

The word “made” is the Hebrew word “banah.” It means to build or structure. From the man God built the woman, and God built the woman’s body in a way that complemented and completed the man.

We need to teach our children that our bodies are unique gifts from God! This is essential in a day when “perfectly” formed models dominate our children’s smartphone screens, and those same smartphones deliver degrading images of the body through pornography. In her book, *Real Sex*, Lauren Winner says,

Bodies are not simply pieces of furniture to decorate or display; they are not trappings about which we have conflicted feelings . . . they are not objects to be dieted away, made to conform to popular standards, or made to perform unthinkable athletic feats with the help of drugs; they are neither tools for scoring points nor burdens to overcome.⁶

⁶ Lauren Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*, Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, MI, 2005. 33-34.

When God created the woman, he created a “suitable helper.” The word “helper” is in no way a demeaning description. The same word is used to refer to God himself.⁷ It describes one who provides what is lacking, one who completes and one who brings healing. The Septuagint⁸ used the Greek word for “physician” to translate “helper.” Just as a physician prescribes the right medication and provides the right procedure, so the woman brings the remedy for man’s aloneness.

God’s desire in creating the woman was to complete the man. The woman was a “suitable helper.” The word “suitable” means “counterpart.” The man and woman were made to complement each other. Each had what the other needed physically, emotionally and spiritually. Together, the man and woman could honor, serve and reveal God’s person in a way they could not do alone.

After God provided the man and woman for each other, he put forth general instructions for their relationship. This teaching is found in Genesis, repeated by Christ in the Gospels and by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. God said the man and woman are to leave their parents, be united to each other and enjoy a one-flesh relationship. Let’s break down the three specifics of this foundational passage about marriage.

⁷ Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7; 1 Samuel 7:12; Psalms 20:2, 46:1

⁸ The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament



LEAVING MOM AND DAD

The man and woman are to leave their mom and dad, who brought them into the world, nourished and raised them. While the married couple will still love, care for and enjoy their parents, a new relationship is started. The core loyalty is no longer to parents, their tradition or influence. Each couple must set their own course with their allegiance being to each other.

This is why a husband or wife should never discuss the issues of marriage with their parents. Likewise, parents should never engage in discussion of this type. Parents, you are partial. You will always take sides. Many couples struggle because the man and/or the woman have not left mom and dad.

When my son, Garrison, married his beautiful wife, Sarah, I had the great privilege of officiating the ceremony. During the message I told them never to go to Sarah's parents or us with marriage issues. I encouraged them to find a counselor or marriage mentor when inevitable problems arose. I said, "Sarah, don't go to your parents. They will always be partial to you. And Garrison, don't come to Mom and me. We will always be partial to Sarah." Parents cannot referee their children's marriage issues!



UNITED TO EACH OTHER

The man and woman are to be united to each other. The word “united” is used to describe permanence. It means to stick to something; to grasp something and not let go. In Scripture it is used to describe the skin clinging to the bones.⁹ It is used to describe a warrior who has fought so long and hard that his hand is frozen to his weapon.¹⁰ In the New Testament, Jesus places this permanence on the divine level. He says, “What God has joined together, let man not separate.”¹¹

Marriage is to be a covenant that rules over time, emotions, joys and sorrows. It’s a commitment that lasts through riches or poverty, health or sickness, good times or bad. Life will have its inevitable challenges. Jesus said that the married man and woman must not separate what God has joined together.

⁹ *Psalm 102:6*

¹⁰ *2 Samuel 23:10*

¹¹ *Mark 10:9*



ONENESS

The man is to leave his father and mother, be united to his wife and together they will become one flesh. The married man and woman experience an intercourse of body, mind and spirit. Aristotle described this oneness as “a single soul dwelling in two bodies.” This one-flesh relationship encompasses four areas.

- ***Spiritual Oneness:*** The husband and wife need to be on the same spiritual page. Believers are to marry only other believers.¹² They must grow together in their love for Christ.
- ***Physical Oneness:*** The husband and wife must have an exclusive intimate relationship with each other. All other options for intimacy are off the table.
- ***Emotional Oneness:*** The couple must commit to exclusive feelings for each other. All other options for emotional attachments, past or present, cannot be in play.¹³
- ***Oneness of Mission:*** The man and woman must be headed in the same direction at the same time for the same reasons.

In Scripture, God gives instructions for this one-flesh relationship. Scripture explains that the man is to be the servant-leader of the new home.¹⁴ After his relationship with the Lord, his first responsibility is always to his wife. He must love

¹² 2 Corinthians 6:14

¹³ Social media has become a threat to many marriages. Be careful with your Facebook friends.

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:23

her, not only in words but in every deed, willing to give his very life for her.¹⁵ He must nourish his wife, providing her with all she needs emotionally, physically and spiritually. He must encourage and support his wife's spiritual growth.¹⁶ This means that he must be growing spiritually as well. He must cherish his wife as a prized treasure from the heavenly Father and must always be faithful to her. The writer to the Hebrews looks each man straight in the eyes and says, "The marriage bed must be undefiled."¹⁷

The wife's task is laid out in Scripture as well. She must place herself under her husband's leadership just as she places herself under the leadership of the Lord.¹⁸ She is to love her husband and demonstrate it by her words and actions. She is to be faithful to him and respect him as the one the sovereign God has chosen for her.¹⁹ The wife, too, must develop as a follower of Jesus Christ.

"Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain."²⁰ A wise husband and wife are committed to having God as the architect and builder of their home. God's design for marriage is for one man and one woman to commit themselves to each other for life.

What causes us to stray from God's design? What are current things in our culture that threaten God's blueprint? Let's start with the big one, the big "D" - divorce.

¹⁵ *Ephesians 5:25*

¹⁶ *Ephesians 5:26-27*

¹⁷ *Hebrews 13:4*

¹⁸ *Ephesians 5:22*

¹⁹ *Ephesians 5:33*

²⁰ *Psalms 127:1*

❧ **CHAPTER TWO** ❧



WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET MAN NOT . . .

There she stands. What a beautiful dress! She purchased the exquisite gown for just this occasion. She will wear it only one time. It seems she has been dreaming about stepping into a dress like that on a day like this for as long as she can remember.

There he stands. He has never looked more handsome and he has never felt happier. There is only one girl for him and today he will commit to be with her for the rest of his life. Within minutes the back doors of the sanctuary will open and she will appear. He is not an emotional man, but today tears well up in his eyes. He is nervous and excited, happy and scared, all at the same time.

Together the man and woman have spent hours planning for this day. They have completed weeks of marriage preparation with a couple from their church. They chose a date and secured a location. They made special calls to ask friends to stand with them. They searched high and low for the perfect place to have the reception. Hours were spent tasting foods to make sure the

guests would never forget the meal (one of his favorite parts of the process). They almost called things off when they couldn't agree on whom to leave off the wedding invitation list. The invitations, which they personally designed, arrived a week late, causing much consternation. As for the honeymoon, the tickets are packed in the front pocket of their suitcases. Only their parents know the destination.

The day has finally arrived; the day of their dreams. Arm in arm they stand at the front of the church with special friends that make up their bridal party. The room is filled with friends and relatives invited to celebrate the occasion. The music is perfect. The soloist is at her best. The moment is surreal.

Then the pastor asks them to face each other and join hands. It's time for the vows of marriage. He reminds them that a vow is a binding pledge and promise. The vows they will say are a formal announcement of their deep love and exclusive commitment to each other. They look deep into each other's eyes. The minister says, "Please repeat these vows."

*To have and to hold from this day forward,
for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish:
and I promise to be faithful to you,
forsaking all others, until death do us part.*

After the marriage vows it's time for the rings. The minister reminds them that the rings are a fitting symbol of the marriage relationship in two respects. First, the ring is made from costly

metal, suggesting the most valuable relationship on earth - that of a Christian marriage. Second, the ring has no beginning or end, fittingly representing the permanence of the marriage relationship.

Then the ring vows are repeated. The pronouncement is made. The kiss seals the deal. The couple is introduced. The friends and relatives explode in applause. Now it's time to party! Watch them dance. Have you ever seen a more stunning couple? Have you ever seen a happier couple? The best man and maid of honor say it best in their speeches. These two were made for each other.

That's how married life begins, with great excitement and expectation to live happily ever after. However, one half of all those who say the vows, dance at the reception and are said to be made for each other won't make it to happily ever after.

The reasons for calling it quits are many and varied.

We just can't get along.

We are headed in two different directions.

We are like two ships passing in the night.

He changed.

She's not the woman I married.

He cheated on me!

She ran off with another man.

She wanted to be free to pursue her career.

He met an old girlfriend on Facebook.

No reason really, we just fell out of love.

Whatever the reason, fifty percent of couples who marry for the first time will call it quits before “death do us part.” One third of divorces in the United States occur within the first five years of marriage, with the highest percentage occurring within the first three years.²¹ The impact on those who divorce and the impact on their children will be felt for the rest of their lives.

In their landmark work, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee followed 131 children who were three to 18 years old when their parents divorced. The authors studied these children for 25 years. Here, in part, is how divorce impacted these children who now were 28 to 43 years old. This lengthy quote is worth reading.

The central finding of this study is that parental divorce impacts detrimentally the capacity to love and be loved within a lasting, committed relationship. At young adulthood, when love, sexual intimacy, commitment, and marriage take center stage, children of divorce are haunted by the ghosts of their parents' divorce and are frightened that the same fate awaits them. These fears, which reach a crescendo at young adulthood, impede their developmental progress into full adulthood. Many eventually overcome their fears, but the struggle to do so is painful and can consume a decade or more of their lives. In addition to overcoming their fear of failure, they have a great deal to learn about the give and take of living with another person, about how to deal with differences, and about how to resolve conflicts. This is knowledge that children acquire

²¹ Larry Kurdick, *Predicting Marital Dissolution: A 5-year Prospective Longitudinal Study of Newlywed Couples*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64 (2), 1993. 221.

from growing up with both parents in reasonably harmonious, intact families. As our study ended, 60% of the women and 40% of the men had been able to establish reasonably gratifying and enduring relationships that included a satisfying sexual relationship. Close to 40% had opted for parenthood. The remainder said they were not interested in having children. A good number enjoyed successful careers but suffered from severe loneliness. Because most of these people were still in their 30s, we may yet see changes in their attitudes toward relationships and parenthood.

One third of the men and women were openly pessimistic about marriage and divorce and sought to avoid both. "If you don't marry, then you don't divorce," was their mantra. Only a few were outright cynical. The majority were eager, even desperate, for a lasting relationship, and fearful that they would never achieve it. They did not want the lives their parents had. Their message was clear: "My parents' divorce is still incomprehensible to me. They met in college. They fell in love. They were compatible in their tastes and values. So, what is to keep the same fate from happening to me?" Over and over, they told us, "I'd love to get married, but I'm sure that I'd jinx it." Or, "Any relationship I'm in will dissolve."

Even being in love and living for years in a reasonably harmonious relationship did not mute their fear of commitment. One man told us, "We have been living together for four years. She brought love and laughter into my life. I can't imagine being with anyone else. But every time she brings up marriage, I feel this great sadness welling up inside of me. That was exactly the way

I felt when I was 7 years old, when my folks split up.” Even those in apparently stable, satisfactory marriages and relationships had a sense of unease, a strong foreboding that their happiness might be short lived, that they somehow did not deserve to be in a happy, long-lasting union. They felt particularly helpless when dealing with conflict. Any argument or even difference of opinion in a close relationship represented the dreaded slippery slope leading to breakup and loss.²²

People who claim that divorce does not impact children are not being honest. We have to come to grips with the lasting influence of divorce on our children and grandchildren.

Granted, there are many things going on within a marriage. A couple needs to understand God’s design for marriage and how he has uniquely wired men and women. The husband and wife need to be aware of the roles that each have and give the freedom and support to fulfill these God-given responsibilities. A couple must be able to communicate well and know how to resolve the unavoidable conflicts that will show up in every relationship. Sex can be used to unite or divide. Each couple must come to grips with the power of sex and choose not to use it as a weapon. Add children, job changes, aging parents, money, graduations, college, weddings and grandchildren to the mix. It’s a wonder any marriage lasts.²³

There is one thing that forms a deep foundation for all the changes and challenges of marriage. It digs down to solid rock

²² Judith S. Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, Hyperion Books, New York, 2000.

²³ Guidance to blogs and how to acquire resources.

and allows the relationship to weather the storms. It's called commitment - the couple resolves to stick together come what may. We must teach our children that marriage is about "until death do us part" commitment.



GOD'S WORD ON COMMITMENT

God's Word on the permanence of marriage is clear: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."²⁴ We considered this verse in the last chapter. Let's review God's idea of commitment.

The word "united to" means to stick to something; to grasp something and not let go. In Scripture, the word is used to describe the skin clinging to the bones. It is used to describe a warrior who has fought so long and so hard that he is physically unable to let go of his sword. The word is also translated "to cleave" or "to cling to." This first mention of marriage in the Bible well describes the long-term permanence that God has in mind for the marriage relationship.

When Jesus repeats this foundational marriage truth in the New Testament, he adds, "Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate."²⁵ Lifelong commitment has

²⁴ *Genesis 2:24*

²⁵ *Matthew 19:6*

always been God's intention for marriage. Jesus continued to explain that divorce was never in God's plan for marriage.²⁶ In fact, God hates divorce.²⁷ Divorce breaks the covenant made in a couple's vows. This dishonors God and each other. God knows the pain it causes. He knows what it does to children.

Marriage is not a casual agreement. It is a covenant made by the husband and wife in the presence of God. This commitment is on record in heaven. How can we make sure that commitment is honored?

²⁶ *Matthew 19:7-9*

²⁷ *Malachi 2:13-16*



UNDERSTANDING COMMITMENT

In his book, *The Heart of Commitment*, Scott Stanley explains two types of commitment. One he calls “constraint” commitment. The other is “dedication” commitment.

CONSTRAINT COMMITMENT

Constraint commitment refers to the external pressures that constrain couples to maintain their relationships. Here are some of the constraint commitment pressures that couples feel.

- **Social Pressure:** Many couples know that their family and friends want them to stay together.
- **Morality of Divorce:** Many couples have been raised to believe that divorce is against the teaching of the Bible.
- **Children:** Most couples are honest enough to admit that divorce will affect their children in a negative way.
- **Spouse’s Welfare:** Even couples who want to split up are concerned about the effect of divorce on their spouse.
- **Finances:** Divorce impacts a couple financially. In most cases, the woman takes the biggest financial hit.
- **Termination Procedure:** Divorce is not a quick, inexpensive or private matter.
- **Alternate Quality:** As bad as their marriage may feel, many couples are concerned about quality of life apart from their spouse. For most people contemplating divorce, the

greatest concern is the degree to which other people might be interested in them as a future mate. Here's the amazing thing: most people want to be married, even if they don't want to stay married.

One could argue that the acceptance of divorce in our culture is making constraint commitment less of an issue, but external pressures are important. They provide a sense of responsibility and accountability. However, a couple can't stop at constraint commitment. They must be dedicated to making their marriage last.

DEDICATION COMMITMENT

Dedication commitment is the internal state of devotion to a person. It "refers to the desire of an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the participants. It is evidenced by the desire . . . not only to continue in the relationship, but also to improve it, to sacrifice for it, and to seek the partner's welfare, not simply one's own."²⁸ Dedication commitment doesn't just happen. It can be developed and built over time. Following are four sources of dedication commitment.

- ***Relationship Agenda:*** A husband and wife need to make a personal commitment to each other that they desire for their relationship to last and will work to make it last. They

²⁸ Stanley and Markman, *Assessing Commitment in Personal Relationship*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, August 1992, 595-608.

will work to be on the same page heading the same direction at the same time.²⁹

- ***Primacy of Relationship:*** For dedication commitment to be established in a relationship, couples have to make marriage a priority. This is demonstrated by making regular times for each other, establishing the priority of dinner together, scheduling dates, and arranging meetings to work through problems and issues.
- ***Couple Identity:*** Couples must view themselves as a team. Research shows that couples who use plural pronouns to describe their relationship like “we” and “our” are more satisfied than couples who use singular pronouns like “I” and “mine.”
- ***Satisfaction with Sacrifice:*** Couples dedicated to each other take pleasure in doing things for their spouse’s benefit and enjoyment. They are willing to make personal sacrifices for each other.

Dedication and constraint commitment are not mutually exclusive. Personal dedication during engagement increases constraint commitment. The experiences of marriage (common experiences, buying a home, having children, death/sicknesses of parents/family) are investments into a relationship. “Simply put, today’s dedication is tomorrow’s constraint.”³⁰ Dedication and constraint commitment combined are like epoxy glue that holds a marriage together.

²⁹ Check out <http://ronmoore.org/marriage-mission-statement/> for instructions on writing a Marriage Mission Statement.

³⁰ Stanley and Markman, *Assessing Commitment in Personal Relationship*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54, August 1992, 595-608.



THE LONG-TERM VIEW

A couple committed to marriage must have the future in mind. They must have a long-term view of their commitment. Eugene Peterson says, “The way we conceive the future sculpts the present, gives contour and tone to nearly every action and thought through the day. If our sense of future is weak; we live listlessly.” Living listlessly is a death nail to a relationship. We have to be willing to invest for the long haul. Scripture reminds us that the “end of a matter is better than its beginning.”³¹

In order to develop a long-term view, let’s identify the characteristics of short-term thinking and contrast them with the biblical view of long-term thinking.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHORT-TERM THINKING

We live in a world that expects instant satisfaction. From the microwave to the microchip, we get what we want now. Life moves with speed, but relationships take time. Think of the statistics. One third of divorces in our country take place within the first five years of marriage! The highest percentage occurs within the first three years! Far too many couples don’t even give marriage a chance. Relationships take time.

³¹ *Ecclesiastes 7:8*

Here are some characteristics of short-term thinking.

- ***Scorekeeping***: Too many couples like to keep score. When they are hurt they note the infraction and administer the penalty. The penalty may be anything from long periods of refusing to talk to withholding intimacy.
- ***Impatience***: Many couples never give their relationship a chance. They are not willing to work through the inevitable challenges. They become dissatisfied with their spouse and their life circumstance. Far too many couples throw in the towel in the early stages of the marriage game.
- ***Selfishness***: Marriage cannot be a “my-way-or-the-highway” proposition. The Bible instructs the man and woman to meet the needs of each other. Selfishness will crater a relationship.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LONG-TERM THINKING

For marriage to work husbands and wives have to commit to the long haul. Here are some characteristics that must be embedded deep into the relationship from the beginning.

- ***Obedience to the Architect of Marriage***: What God has joined together, let no man separate. Christian couples must be committed to doing marriage God’s way.
- ***Personal Spiritual Growth***: Both husband and wife must be in the process of spiritual growth. This personal commitment to grow spiritually is essential for the roles and responsibilities that God has given them. Most of us want our spouses to change, but the most important and productive thing you can do when you are not pleased with your

marriage relationship is to change yourself. Spiritual growth is the key to personal change.

- ***Growing Together Spiritually:*** A husband and wife must grow together spiritually. This begins with shared times of spiritual devotion and prayer.³² It is also important to serve together. Find a ministry where both of your gifts can be used. Enjoy the experience of doing ministry alongside each other.
- ***A Marriage Mission Statement:*** God brought you together to do things that you could never do alone. A marriage mission statement allows you to pursue the purpose of your relationship. Instruction on writing a marriage mission statement is on my website along with several examples.³³
- ***Making the Choice to Give Up Other Choices:*** Saying “I do” means that I have made the choice to give up other choices. I cannot do everything I want to do and at the same time invest in my relationship. This is not a bad thing. My choice to give up some things produces spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with my spouse. Scott Stanley writes,

Commitment involves making choices, protecting choices from other options, and arriving at ongoing decisions that reflect the

³² *Journey through the Bible is a devotional I have written that couples can read together. The 365-day devotional will take you through the Bible together and provide the opportunity for discussion and application of God's Word.*

³³ <http://ronmoore.org/marriage-mission-statement/>

*priorities of your commitments. Some people have trouble giving up anything, therefore, they can never make real commitments. But the richer paths of life call for choices to be made.*³⁴

- ***Serving Each Other:*** The Bible says that we are to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”³⁵ Couples committed to the long haul enjoy making personal sacrifices for their spouse. Research shows “that people who were the most comfortable with the notion of sacrificing for their mates were also those who tended to be the happiest together, the most dedicated to each other, and the most self-disclosing in their marriages.”³⁶

Commitment can best be summed up by the Apostle Paul’s powerful words in 1 Corinthians 13. This passage, better than any other, speaks to the essential ingredients needed to enjoy a long-term lifelong commitment. Read this passage often and read it often to your children.

³⁴ Scott Stanley, *The Heart of Commitment* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998).

³⁵ *Ephesians 5:21*

³⁶ Stanley, *The Heart of Commitment*. (Nashville: Nelson, 1998).

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.



IS DIVORCE EVER A BIBLICAL OPTION?

Marriage is ordained by God, blessed by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and is to be held in high honor by all men and women. God established marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and woman. Jesus emphasized this indissoluble union when he said, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate.”³⁷ So, is there ever a time when divorce is allowed?

Although divorce was never God’s design, due to the sinfulness of man, it is permitted in the following cases:

1. Immorality³⁸

Divorce is allowed when one partner is involved in physical adultery. Adultery violates the intended oneness of marriage. Adultery physically breaks the vow of exclusive intimacy and is a sin against one’s own body.³⁹

The spouse of the adulterer is freed from the violated relationship. However, in cases where there is true repentance, reconciliation and restoration of the marriage always honor God.

³⁷ *Matthew 19:6*

³⁸ *Matthew 19:9*

³⁹ *1 Corinthians 6:18*

2. Abandonment

In 1 Corinthians 7:10-17, Paul says that if an unbelieving spouse abandons the relationship, the believing spouse is free to divorce.

TWO QUESTIONS:

What about abuse?

When there is abuse in a marriage situation, the couple must separate. No one should ever be required to remain in an abusive situation. This situation should be handled by church leaders to determine counseling and future steps.

Is pornography grounds for divorce?

Pornography is a sin that degrades women and inevitably damages the marriage relationship. Those involved in pornography must agree to needed help and counseling. However, as wrong and hurtful as it is, I do not believe pornography is in the same category as adultery.

Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 6:18 that believers are to “flee sexual immorality.” In this passage, Paul uses a Greek word that describes various kinds of sinful sexual intercourse. Paul continues in this verse to explain, “All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.” The word translated “sins sexually” is the same word used above that describes sexual intercourse.

It seems, then, that physical adultery – sexual intercourse outside of the marriage relationship – is the biblical grounds for divorce.

Let's face it. All sin is messy. It always brings pain on others. In our sin we need others to confront us and hold us accountable. In our pain we need others to walk beside us and give us biblical counsel. That's why it is so important for a couple to be involved in (and teach their children to be involved in) a church committed to God's Word, led by godly leaders and surrounded by friends who love them.

BUT . . . I HAVE BEEN DIVORCED

I know many of you reading this have experienced divorce. Many of you are remarried with a blended family. I want to assure you that this does not exclude you from speaking to your children about marriage and commitment. If parents could speak only to the areas of life where they have been perfect, then we would all be silent.

You are well aware of the pain of going through divorce. Share that with your children. Let them know that both you and their father or mother made mistakes. No spouse is perfect in a marriage. Certainly you can share the lessons that you've learned. You must always treat and speak about their father or mother with respect and grace. The respect and grace demonstrated to your ex-spouse should not be an issue to your present spouse. They should expect it.

Teach your children about the biblical standard of commitment. Let them know that your divorce does not take away from God's standard. You expect them, and God expects them, to live by his guidelines.

You may want to invest in Christian counseling to address some of the issues that your children have stuffed below the surface. You are responsible for helping them work through the emotions brought on by the break up.

Speak openly with your children about how they feel about marriage. Teach them the dangers of living together. For those who know the pain of divorce and don't want to repeat it, the statistics of living together should prove a deterrent.

Above all, teach your children about God's grace and forgiveness. Let them know you have sought that forgiveness from God and you desire forgiveness from them as well.

Let your children know that you are praying for their future spouse. Show them, from this point on, what commitment looks like.

CHAPTER THREE



LIVING TOGETHER: WHY NOT TAKE A TEST DRIVE?

More and more people are coming to the conclusion that living together makes sense. It's not that they oppose the institution of marriage. In fact, ninety percent of couples living together say they eventually want to get married to the person they are living with or someone else. First, they feel a test drive is in order. According to the latest statistics, over fifty percent of couples getting married for the first time will have lived together before saying "I do."⁴⁰

Why are so many couples deciding to take a test drive before repeating vows to each other at their wedding ceremony?

⁴⁰ Myron Magnet, Editor, *Modern Sex: Liberation and Its Discontents* (The Manhattan Institute. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2001), 9.



WHY COUPLES CHOOSE TO LIVE TOGETHER BEFORE MARRIAGE

There are many reasons couples choose to live together. Let's consider three main factors.

COMPATIBILITY

Pamela Smock, a researcher at the University of Michigan, writes,

... Cohabiting young adults tell us that they are doing so because it would be unwise to marry without first living together in a society marked by high levels of divorce . . . For many people, marriage is now like the best relationship, and is highly valued as a relationship. It's "Wait until we know the relationship is good and solid, and we'll get married." ⁴¹

Most important things in life have a required "practice time." Young drivers take driver's training and are required to drive for a period of time with a licensed driver, scaring years off the licensed driver's life. Life expectancy for parents would be well over 100 years if we didn't have to teach our teens to drive.

⁴¹ Sam Roberts, *New York Times*, "To Be Married is to be Outnumbered," (October 15, 2006).

What would you do if you were on a plane and, while taxiing to the runway, the pilot's voice came over the cabin speaker and said, "Welcome aboard. I'll be your pilot today. I want you to know this is the first time I have ever flown a plane. We'll be cleared for takeoff soon. Sit back, relax and enjoy your flight." A pilot goes through extensive study, simulated training and co-piloting before ever being trusted to fly a plane.

Therefore, when it comes to marriage, doesn't it make sense to get in a little practice? Why not take the thing for a test drive? Marriage is serious stuff! Don't you want to make sure the relationship is solid? Don't you want to make sure a divorce doesn't end up impacting children? In her blog, *5 (Secular) Reasons Not to Live Together Before Marriage*, Jennifer Fulwiler wrote, "'I never want to get divorced,' one friend told me as she moved her belongings into her boyfriend's apartment, 'so it's important to me to make sure we can really work together before going through with a wedding.'"⁴²

CONVENIENCE

For Amanda Hawn, living together before marriage is all about making life less complicated. The 28-year-old writer who lives with her boyfriend in San Francisco says,

*Owning three toothbrushes and finding that they are always at the wrong house when you are getting ready for bed wears on you. Moving in together has simplified life.*⁴³

⁴² www.ncregister.com/blog/jennifer-fulwiler/5-secular-reasons-not-to-live-together-before-marriage

⁴³ *New York Times* (3) 10.15.06

There are also economic conveniences as well. Paying for one place to live is certainly cheaper than two. Of course, there is also the convenience of a ready and willing sexual partner.

SCARRED AND SCARED

Travis Anderson and his girlfriend have lived together for over two years in the St. Paul, Minnesota area. They plan to get married. Anderson's parents are divorced and he does not want to go through that experience.

We took our time in getting engaged. We wanted to make sure it was right. Living together can always be undone. The marriage part of it we see a little differently. (I) definitely didn't want to be the person who had to tell a child that he was moving out.⁴⁴

Couples want their marriages to last. They want to have a future together, but the high rate of divorce comes with consequences. There is a crisis in the confidence about the institution of marriage. Many young couples today choose living together over marriage because of the pain they have endured and still feel.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ USA Today (2)

⁴⁵ USA Today (2)



THE REVEALING STATISTICS OF LIVING TOGETHER

From a strictly human standpoint we can understand why many couples are choosing to live together. They don't want to replay the pain, but the reality is that living together greatly increases the possibility of the occurrence of the very thing they don't want to happen. Check out these revealing statistics.

- The majority of couples who live together before marriage either break up or marry within two years.⁴⁶
- The rate of divorce in couples who have lived together before marriage is 50% higher than couples who have not lived with each other before marriage.
- After ten years, only 15 out of 100 couples who took a test drive before marriage are still together.⁴⁷

Here's the reality: Living together doesn't work. It doesn't work because it is not the Designer's plan. What does a biblical marriage look like?

⁴⁶ Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case For Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), 38.

⁴⁷ *PreachingToday.com*, Terry Mattingly, Washington Bureau religion column (8.21.02)



THE BIBLICAL LOVE PACKAGE

The greatest love song ever written is tucked away in the Old Testament. The *Song of Solomon* is about a man and a woman who are passionately in love with each other. It is a song about God's gift of sexual intimacy between a man and woman in the context of marriage. It is about the passionate fire of intimacy. This inspired book pulls no punches regarding sex, but it is in no way crude or vulgar. Through exquisite poetry, the gift of relationship and sex is vividly and beautifully described.

The song was written by Solomon. Granted, Solomon's many wives and concubines do not qualify him as the best example of love and marriage. However, God uses this man, who had experienced what love was not, to teach us what love really is. One commentator says "the experiences recorded in this book may reflect the only . . . pure romance he had."⁴⁸

There are three Hebrew words found throughout the song that help us understand the biblical plan for a lasting marriage relationship.

⁴⁸ Ryrie Study Bible, p. 1032

REA: INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP

His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely.

This is my beloved, this is my friend . . .

Song of Solomon 5:16

As the soon-to-be wife describes her soon-to-be husband, she calls him her *rea*. This word does not describe a buddy that you have over for wings and Monday Night Football. *Rea* describes a companion, a person you want to share your life with in a deep and meaningful way.

In one relationship study, couples were asked to rank a list of possible goals for their marriage. The single most important goal listed was to have a friend in one's partner.⁴⁹

In another study aimed at determining why singles wanted to get married, eighty-four percent described friendship as the primary reason. This should not be surprising. God himself said it is not good for the man to be alone. He made man and woman as companions for each other.

When you have a real friend in your spouse, you have a loyal companion. A real friend will stay with you and stick by you. A real friend "loves at all times."⁵⁰ When you have a real friend in your spouse, you have a lot of fun with each other. One study found this:

⁴⁹ Markman, Stanley and Blumberg, *Fighting For Your Marriage: Positive Steps for a Loving and Lasting Relationship*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 233-234

⁵⁰ Proverbs 17:17

Among all the variables, the amount of fun . . . partners had together emerged as the strongest factor in understanding the overall marital happiness. That's not to say that other things weren't going on in these relationships, but good relationships become great when you're preserving both the quantity and quality of your fun times together.⁵¹

The foundation of biblical love begins with friendship, but certainly it doesn't stop there.

YAHAB: A DEEP AFFECTION

A second part of the biblical love package describes a deep affection of the heart. Throughout the *Song of Solomon* the Hebrew word *yahab* is translated "faint with love."⁵² *Yahab* describes the feeling you have when you are "head over heels" in love.

This love is a love of commitment, a love of covenant. *Yahab* says, "I want to be with you forever. Let's plan our future together. Let's have children together. Let's grow old together. Let's write our story together. Let's fulfill our mission together. Let's make a vow to God with a room full of witnesses that we are committed to each other no matter what. Come what may in life - good times or bad, sickness or health - we are in this for keeps. Death is the only thing that could possibly separate us." *Yahab* is a love of loyal dedication.

⁵¹ Markman, Stanley and Blumberg, *Fighting For Your Marriage*, 250.

⁵² *Song of Solomon* 2:5; 3:1-4

A relationship starts with *rea* – a deep friendship. Added to friendship is *yahab* – a loyal dedication. There is one more part in the biblical love package

DOD: PHYSICAL INTIMACY

The Hebrew word *dod* means “to caress, rock, fondle, embrace, consummate.” It refers to the physical act of sexual intimacy. It is the chandelier-swinging, earth-shaking and mind-blowing act of intimacy. God has made man and woman to desire sex. He has made our bodies to fit together in true physical oneness. Sex is God’s idea. It is meant to be enjoyed . . . really enjoyed. However, it has to be a part of the biblical love package that includes friendship and commitment within the marriage relationship.

WHY GET MARRIED?

It could be argued, and many do, that the biblical love package can work outside of marriage. Why does a person need to go through the formalities of a wedding to have friendship, companionship and sex?

What does the Bible say about the importance of marriage?

THE MARRIAGE COMMITMENT

*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and
is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

Genesis 2:24

Moses authored the first five books of the Bible. As he wrote Genesis, God revealed to him the historical narrative of creation, but notice what happens in Genesis 2:24. Moses breaks from the historical narrative to make an editorial contemporary comment. Describing how God created the woman for the man, and vice versa, he breaks to explain the marriage covenant with the words, “That is why . . .” With this introduction he describes the act of marriage. Moses is saying, in essence, “Since God made man and woman for each other, that is why a man leaves his father and mother, is united to his wife, and together they become one flesh.” This verse describes the three parts of the biblical marriage package.

***Rea*: For this reason a man will leave his father and mother**

This describes the friendship (*rea*) part of the love package. The man and woman’s allegiance swings from their parents. Their mom and dad have willingly raised, nourished and provided for them. Now their allegiance moves to each other as friends and companions.

***Yahab*: United to his wife**

The word “united to” means to stick to something and not let go. This is the commitment (*yahab*) part of the package. In the Jewish community this commitment had two parts. The *kiddushin* was the engagement – the promise of marriage. The *huppah* was the actual wedding ceremony.

When it came time for the *huppah*, the groom made his way to the place of the ceremony. He was accompanied by a

loud entourage of friends with tambourines and other musical instruments. Everyone knew that a wedding - a *huppah* - was about to take place.

There was no mistaking who the bride was. She wore a beautiful dress and was adorned with jewels. Escorted by her companions, the bride was led to the home of the groom. Love songs were sung. Speeches were made. The ceremony lasted for a week! There was plenty to eat and drink. There was a public celebrative ceremony of commitment. Family and friends heard the vows and enjoyed the ceremony. Then they partied with music, dancing and food. This was where Jesus performed his first miracle.⁵³ As the father of three girls, I am very thankful wedding celebrations don't last for a week today.

Dod: They will become one flesh

At the end of the feast, the bride was escorted to the bridal chambers by her parents and the husband and wife consummated their union in the gift of sexual intimacy (*dod*).

The wedding ceremony has a long tradition. It is not simply making marriage legit. It is a celebration of God's plan for the couple to be friends, companions and lovers. It includes family and friends to witness the couple's love and dedication to each other. Vows are made before these same family and friends who should remind the couple of their promises.

The wedding is not the product of a test drive. It is a beautiful public declaration of love and commitment to each other and to God.

⁵³ *John 2:1-11*



WHY LIVING TOGETHER DOESN'T WORK

Remember the living together stats we considered earlier? The majority of couples who live together before marriage either break up or get married within two years. Couples who live together before marriage are twice as likely to get divorced than couples who don't. Within ten years, only 15 out of 100 couples who lived together before marriage are still together.

Why doesn't living together work? Here are several reasons.

1. Living together is an attempt at friendship focused on sex without commitment. One person described living together as having a ready and available sex partner who will share the rent and do some cooking without making long-term promises.
2. The heart of the commitment is cut out, so loyal friendship is impossible. There is no commitment of stability. You may not be here tomorrow. Without the emotion of commitment, sex is just something a couple does together. When sex is reduced to a physical act outside the bounds of marriage, it is never a satisfying part of the biblical package. All the research shows what the Bible explains - married sex is better sex.
3. In a living together situation, commitment is absent and friendship is compromised. Couples who live together have sex more often than married couples because it's the

primary component in their relationship. Living together is a relationship teeter totter with the fulcrum being sex.

4. In the biblical love package, sex is a sacred union, exclusive to marriage, and a continual symbol of commitment. Every time a married couple makes love they remind themselves of their promise to love, cherish and care for each other for better or worse, until death. They are committed for the long haul, so the anxiety of failure is diminished. They are committed to a future of maturing and growing their relationship. That's why sexual intimacy in the context of marriage is always more satisfying.
5. Cohabitation copulation is without commitment. If there is anything lonelier than being in bed alone, it's waking up next to someone who just had sex with you and doesn't love you enough to make a long-term promise.
6. Even when marriage occurs, the foundation is so fragile and the respect for marriage so weak that 85 times out of 100 the marriage is over within ten years.



WHEW! THEY FINALLY GOT MARRIED

Unfortunately, many parents are relieved when their son or daughter in a living-together situation gets married. Sadly, chances are that within a few years you will be consoling your child as he or she goes through divorce.

I read recently that a pastor conducted a mass wedding ceremony for all the couples in his church who were living together. He had them stand during the service and say their vows. The story was written as if the pastor did an admirable thing by making these couples legal. I cringed when I read the story. The pastor set a lot of couples up for failure.

Couples who have lived together need to push the reset button. They need to understand that they are outside the bounds of God's design. When you don't build a house according to the architect's plan, it won't stand. Couples who have lived together need to separate for six months to a year before marriage. They need to commit to abstinence during that time. Then they can determine if their relationship has the components of a biblical love package or if it was just about sex after all.

Living together doesn't work because it's not God's design for the marriage relationship. His intent is one man and one woman together for life. That plan is threatened when a couple dismisses marriage. As we will see in the next chapter, the plan is also threatened when a couple is the same sex.

❧ **CHAPTER FOUR** ❧



HOMOSEXUALITY AND GAY MARRIAGE

As I write this, many politicians from both sides of the aisle are speaking out in favor of gay marriage. Many “leaders” are fearful that unless they support the LGBT movement, their funding may dry up and requests for television and radio interviews will go away. Opposition to same-sex marriage is characterized by the mainstream media as clinging to “old fashioned” values or, worse, as homophobia and hatred. However, the issue of homosexuality is not a political one. It is not an issue for the courts or state lawmakers. It is not for media powers to thrust upon us.

I believe it is a moral issue and impacts each of us, and for me it is very personal.

John has been the only childhood friend that I have kept up with during my adult life. I have had many friends who lasted through high school and college and even after college. Over time, through the journey of life, we lost track with each other, but that has not been the case with John.

The weekend Lori and I were married, John was there. He helped me set up this huge charcoal grill for the rehearsal dinner. I know you are not supposed to see your bride before the wedding, but Lori and I didn't care. On the day of our wedding, John, Lori and I went to a nearby town in an old pickup to haul something we needed for the reception. We always kept up with John through e-mails, letters and phone calls.

During the summers, Lori and the kids normally went to Oklahoma for two or three weeks and I would join them for a week or so. While Lori and the kids were away, John would drive to Pittsburgh. We would do a project around the house: putting in a new ceiling, laying a tile floor, tearing down an old shed, and then John and I would drive straight through to Oklahoma.

John was very active in his church. He was involved in a men's group at the pastor's home on Saturday mornings. He attended seminary and loved to do extensive biblical studies. In fact, in my files there is a study that John did on couples living together. I used some of his research in my previous chapter.

Prior to coming to Pittsburgh for our project week he would say, "Let's go through a study together." During breakfast we would do a Bible study or a book study. Then in the evening we would go to a baseball game or rent a movie we wanted to see. If there was anything inappropriate in the movie, John would be the first to say, "That's it, I'm not watching it anymore."

During our times together, the subject of marriage would always come up. I would say, "John, you really need a wife." He would tell me about a woman he had taken out for lunch after church or a woman he wanted to date in his office. Always on our

trips back to Oklahoma, somewhere in Missouri, the conversation would get serious. He would talk about his past and some of the challenges he had experienced with relationships.

Maybe I should have put two and two together. When he told me he was gay, I never saw it coming.

While I am fully aware that there is a strong homosexual agenda in our culture, I am convinced that most people who struggle in this area of sexual temptation are not speaking from political platforms or marching in parades. They are our friends, brothers and sisters. They are our sons and daughters. Years ago I preached on the topic of homosexuality. Right before the service a couple approached me. They were strong Christians and longtime members of our church. They said, "We are very interested in hearing what you have to say this morning. You probably didn't know that our son is gay. He is a great son and we love him very much." I didn't change what I was going to say, but I spoke that morning with a different attitude, praying that I could put forth the truth with gentleness and respect. Just a few years later, I received a call from that same couple. Their son had died and they asked me to speak at his funeral. As I met with that family and his partner to prepare that message, my prayer was the same, "Oh, God help me to speak truth in love."

Most men and women who struggle in this area fight a silent, lonely battle. Because of shame, guilt and fear of rejection, they can't speak openly to people they love. My friend later told me that when he visited me, he would lie in bed and weep because another day had gone by and he could not share his struggle with me.

Let's consider what God's Word says about his design and intention for sexuality. Let's develop a Christlike framework of response.



GOD'S WORD ON SEXUALITY

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

God formed the man from the dust of the ground. The word “formed” means “to shape or fashion.” It gives the picture of a potter working with clay to shape his intended product. In a similar fashion, the human body with all its parts, inside and out, was designed and formed by God, the great potter. The formation of flesh was lifeless until the Creator stooped down and breathed in life. With the breath of God filling his lungs, man became a living being, body and soul.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:20b-25

God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him,”⁵⁴ so he took from the man’s side and formed the woman.

The word “helper” is a word usually used to refer to God himself. It describes one who provides what is lacking; one who completes and one who brings healing. God’s desire in creating the woman was to complete the man. Together the couple can honor, serve and reveal God’s person in a way neither could do alone. They are to complete each other physically as well.

God designed our bodies. Men and women are made with sexual parts that fit together. The act of intimacy is a vivid picture of the one-flesh relationship. The emotional and physical act of sex is a deep experience of the one-flesh relationship.

However, the forming of a man and woman was for more than sexual pleasure or the experience of oneness. God told the man to “be fruitful and increase in number.”⁵⁵ One reason that it was not good for the man to be alone was because man, by himself, could not be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. By himself, he has only part of what it takes to procreate. The body

⁵⁴ Genesis 2:18

⁵⁵ Genesis 1:28

that God created for man could not complete the vision that God had for his creation.

God's plan for forming the man and woman differently included the marvelous and miraculous process of reproduction. God gave man and woman the awesome privilege and responsibility of creating a new being. This new person can only come to be from what man and woman provide. It takes both the male and female to "be fruitful and increase in number."

God's plan is for the man and woman to be united together in a public ceremony before man and God. Then this man and woman will come together in sexual intimacy enjoying the different bodies that God designed. In the sometimes chandelier-swinging and sometimes beautiful ordinariness of this sacred sexual union, they will remind themselves of their promise to love and cherish and care for each other. Then, when God so wills, that union will bring new life into the world to be loved and nourished and taught.

In the context of home, the man and woman will model what it means to love God and mentor this new life. Sex between a man and a woman in the context of marriage is God's design for populating the world and providing an environment where their children can grow in stature, wisdom and favor with God and man.

A lifelong commitment between a man and woman is God's design for marriage, but then there is Genesis 3.



GENESIS 3

In Genesis 3, sin entered the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. From that time to now, the ideal of creation is marred by sin. This shows up so often in the gift of sex. Now the strong sexual drive is in the hands of sinful men and women. Like a nuclear bomb in the hands of a rogue nation, things get dangerous.

In his Word, God makes it very clear that anything outside his design for sex is sin. Sex before marriage is sin and carries dangerous and heartbreaking consequences. Sex outside of marriage is the sin of adultery and carries dangerous and heartbreaking consequences.⁵⁶ Sex expressed between a man and a man or a woman and a woman is the sin of homosexuality and, like all sin, carries dangerous and heartbreaking consequences. God's command is clear, "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable."⁵⁷

Like every other sin in the eyes of God, it is revolting and abhorrent. Like every other sexual temptation, it is a strong drive that must be disciplined and contained. Like every other sin, it cannot be explained away as an obsolete Old Testament teaching.

⁵⁶ *Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6, Hebrews 13:4, et. al.*

⁵⁷ *Leviticus 18:22*

In the New Testament, Jesus clearly addresses God's design for marriage between a man and woman for life.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Matthew 19:3-6

In responding to a question about divorce, Jesus went all the way back to God's perfect plan in Genesis. He emphasized and re-established God's only allowance for sexual intimacy. Any attempt at sexual satisfaction apart from God's design is sin. It is a counterfeit experience. Marriage is reserved for a man and woman. Same-sex marriage is not God's design or intention.



FOR THOSE WHO STRUGGLE WITH HOMOSEXUALITY

No doubt many people are tempted in the area of homosexuality. Here are two important ways to address this struggle.

1. Admit it and deal with it.

The longer you hide your struggle, the more entrenched the temptation will become. When you hide your temptation and refuse to deal with it, one day the dam of holding it back will break.

The Apostle Paul explains that God's judgment is on those who "suppress the truth by their wickedness."⁵⁸ When we hold back or restrain the truth by our sin, God finally gives us over to our sinful desires.⁵⁹ Hidden and ignored, sin darkens and hardens our hearts. The farther and longer you travel away from God, the harder the return trip becomes.

2. By God's grace and through God's power, you can change.

There are those who argue that homosexuality is inborn. There was a study done in 1991 by Simon LaVay that many

⁵⁸ *Romans 1:18*

⁵⁹ *Romans 1:24-27*

still point to as proof. This study has not been accepted by the majority of the scientific community.

There are, however, many things that may lead one to be tempted in this area — sexual abuse, verbal abuse, unmet needs of love, an unhealthy family environment, personality temperaments, media influences, peer labeling, harassment, or alienation ... the list goes on.

Whatever the sin, change is always possible through the power of Jesus Christ. Read these words from Scripture.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

When we submit to God, change can take place. However, don't think there will not be challenges during the healing process. Some people think if you just pray hard enough, sin in your life disappears and temptation goes away. God can do that, but he seldom works in that way.

Think about it this way: Suppose you wanted a vegetable garden to grow in your backyard. You could pray for a year that God would make the vegetables grow. When the garden doesn't

show up, you may even be angry with God that he didn't hear your prayers. The reality is that although it is God who makes the vegetables grow, we have to prepare the soil, plant the seeds, water the seeds and keep the weeds out. Then God, who gives us the life and energy to carry out our part, is the one who makes the vegetables grow. In the same way, if you want to experience change in your life, you have work to do in the process.



HOW SHOULD BELIEVERS RESPOND TO HOMOSEXUALITY?

We want to do marriage and relationships in a biblical way and we want to respond to those struggling with sin in a biblical way. Certainly, we cannot back down from the truth of God's Word. It is the standard for life and living. At the same time God, in his Word, instructs us on how we should respond to others.

Here are some important principles from Luke 7 for us to know and apply.

1. Jesus did not turn sinners away, whatever the sin.

Neither should we.

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood

behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner."

Luke 7:36-39

I think most of us treat homosexuality like a different sin, a worse sin. Like the prostitute in the story, we feel there are "sinners" with whom we don't want to associate. I confess, had my friend told me he had moved in with a girl and she was pregnant I would have had an easier time accepting that than homosexuality. I am not proud of that feeling. It was wrong. Stanton Jones of Wheaton College says, "If you cannot empathize with a homosexual person because of fear of, or revulsion to them, then you are failing our Lord."

2. We cannot forget the extent of our debt that has been canceled by Jesus.

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Luke 7:40-43

Spiritual pride is a sin. In our Lord's interaction with the Pharisees, spiritual pride is repeatedly addressed. Robert Murray McCheyne well said, "The seed of every sin known to man is in my heart." Spiritual pride provides the fertile soil and environment for sin to sprout and grow. The Pharisee pointed out the "speck" in the woman's eye while walking around with the "plank" of spiritual pride in his own. Jesus called him on his proud judgment. He will do the same for us.

This in no way means that we back down from the truth, but we should speak it with gentleness and respect. John Bradford was an English reformer in the 1500s. Seeing a group of prisoners going to their execution, Bradford uttered the now famous words, "There, but for the grace of God go I." We must never forget the protection of God's grace on our lives.

3. Repentance comes before forgiveness

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Repentance must precede forgiveness. Repentance means you are sorry for your sin and don't want to continue in it. Repentance means that you turn from your sin. Forgiveness does not take place when you are happy to continue in your sin.

A few years ago, *Time* magazine did a cover story titled: *The Battle over Gay Teens*. In the story, several teens from evangelical homes told of how their parents would not speak to them when they shared their struggles with homosexuality. The author of the article interviewed Michael Wilson, a 22-year-old from Grand Rapids, Michigan. Listen to what the author says:

...While [Michael Wilson] says he still has gay friends - among them, one of his three ex-boyfriends - Wilson believes God doesn't want him to have relationships with men anymore. He often speaks of his "identity in Christ," and to him that trumps his identity as a gay man. He doesn't deny that he is still attracted to men, but he doesn't seem to be struggling. "I don't think God would give you a struggle," he says. "I think he brings freedom." ⁶¹

We live in a fallen world. On this side of Genesis 3, it's not the way it's supposed to be. In our own fallenness and the fallenness of those around us we will struggle with sin. Many times it is in the area of sexual sin. God doesn't give us the struggle. It comes from our sinfulness and the sinfulness of those around us. God certainly brings the freedom. He gives freedom to deal with and overcome our sin and he gives freedom to love and accept the sinner.

⁶¹ *Time*, October 10, 2005

Marriage between a man and woman for life is God's idea and his design. It is not something we can change with time. It is, in essence, immutable. It provides the very best for our children. In Mainwaring's words, "We should not adulterate nor mutilate its definition, thereby denying its riches to current and future generations."⁶²

⁶² Mainwaring, *Witherspoon Institute*, 2013.



A NOTE TO PARENTS

A few years ago, *Time* magazine did a feature article on the sexual mores of our culture. The article noted the sexual ethics that are being discussed and experienced among young people. In their research, the writers found that children desire clear instruction about sex from their parents. Unfortunately, many moms and dads feel confused, powerless and ill-equipped to address the issue.

Ideally, most kids say, they would prefer their parents do the tutoring... Recent studies indicate that many teens think their parents are the most accurate source of information and would like to talk to them more about sex and sexual ethics but can't get their attention long enough. [One teenager] sees the conundrum this way: "Parents haven't set boundaries, but they are expecting them." ⁶³

When it comes to sexual ethics, parents cannot be reluctant to discuss what God has clearly addressed. Children want their parents to teach them the foundational principles of morality. They want their parents to show what this morality looks like in real life, set the boundaries for them and provide the needed encouragement and support.

⁶³ *Time*, June 15, 1998

Parents, we cannot expect our children to live within God's ordained borders if we neglect to teach and demonstrate them. Our children cannot be confused regarding God's design of marriage and commitment.

It has been said, "You cannot impart what you do not possess." I encourage you to teach these truths from God's Word. You are the parent. Your children desire that you instruct them. What you teach, they will remember forever. What you fail to teach them, they cannot learn from anyone else.

We must teach our children that marriage is God's design and must be done his way. We need to explain to our children the biblical love components of *rea*, *yahab* and *dod*. We must show them with our marriages what a balanced relationship looks like.

We must not shy away from teaching our children about sex. They are bombarded by sexual images from early on. We have to teach them about God's design. It is not enough to "Just say no." We have to show them why it is important for them to wait. There are many helpful resources for parents.⁶⁴

Most importantly, we must demonstrate what commitment in marriage looks like. Divorce makes living together attractive. The actions of one generation have consequences on the next. We must do marriage right so we can teach our children from the solid foundation of mentoring and modeling.

We must guard our homes! We must set the boundaries. Our children need and want our instruction, encouragement and support.

⁶⁴ See www.silverringthing.com for resources and events.

Fathers, think of your homes as castles and you are the guarding knights. The knight protected his wife and children. When barbarian intruders came, the knights set the oiled fields on fire. If the barbarians got closer, they shot them with flaming arrows. If they got closer, they dropped big stones on their heads. If somehow they got over the walls, the knights beat them to a pulp.

Moms and dads, “Be the parents!” We must teach and protect our children.







NOTES

