

Some argue that marriage is “just a piece of paper.” The reality is that marriage is more than a private commitment or a hall of records document. It is intended to be and has historically always been celebrated in a public ceremony. The Bible speaks of marriage more than 40 times. Jesus himself attended and affirmed a marriage celebration (John 2). Additionally, it serves to describe the sacred relationship between Jesus Christ and his bride, the church (Eph. 5:25-32).

Sometimes people say, “We don’t need a ceremony to prove our love for one another.” However in a celebration of marriage, you declare your love and dedication to your mate, providing public proof of your ongoing commitment to one another in the spiritual oneness that God creates. Marriage announces that you belong to each other for life.

{ *Pursue God’s best* }

God can provide that someone special for you. Ask him to help you find a soul mate with whom you can commit to a lifelong covenant of love. Pray for a life’s partner that will complement you, bringing balance and strength to your partnership and companionship that is mutually fulfilling (Gen. 2:18).

In the first book of the Bible, God invites each man and woman to leave their home and commit to and become one with their mate (Gen. 2:24). The marriage God intends is nurtured by love that expresses itself in commitment that is not swayed or swerved by cost or circumstance (Eph. 5:21-28, 31, 33).

When God declares the marriage bed holy, he affirms sexuality and its expression and enjoyment. Scripture clearly affirms sex as one of the joys of marriage. In fact, the Bible’s Song of Solomon is a virtual sensuality manual. The freedom and pleasure of sexual expression inside a marriage covenant is unsurpassed (Gen. 2:25; Prov. 5:15-20; 1 Cor. 7:2-5).

{ *Now what?* }

Marriage is God’s idea; it always has been. Sex is God’s idea; we didn’t invent it. God’s intended plan is that the two go together. He makes that clear.

The Lord is also big on grace. It is his delight to forgive us when we sin. It’s never too late to start getting it right. Purity is a worthy and fulfilling commitment, and in that pursuit God is the one who wipes the slate clean and strengthens us for the life to which he calls us.



Faith & Life

Pamphlet Series

Sex before marriage

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The Bible clearly teaches that sexual intimacy is a privilege God intends for couples to enjoy within marriage. All the way back to the first book of the Bible, God makes it clear that he intends a man and a woman to become husband and wife and be “united” (Gen. 2:24). In the New Testament, God’s original design of marriage fidelity is clearly reaffirmed (Heb. 13:4). Throughout history most cultures have lived consistently with this plan of God. Their laws, customs and social norms tell that story.

Today most people think and say otherwise. Even the laws of our land make it easy to live together without following God’s way. Eighty percent of unmarried young adults ages 18-29 have had sex (National Survey of Reproductive and Contraceptive Knowledge).

It is also true that cohabiting relationships are more likely to come apart than marriages. In his book *Marriage Savers*, Michael McManus reports that 45 percent of those who begin cohabiting do not marry. Additionally, people who marry after living together are statistically more likely to divorce (National Survey of Families and Households). Scripture makes clear the original plan: “What God has joined together let no one separate” (Matt. 19:4-6). So how should we make our way in the face of these realities?

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Hebrews 13:4

{ Deceptive thinking }

One very popular and much proclaimed argument for sexual freedom is to say that it is nothing more than a pleasurable sex act. However, most psychologists agree with the scriptural claim that there is no such thing as casual sex even though some people try hard to make it as casual as possible. People who have sex before marriage imagine that nothing has really changed, but it has. The Bible clarifies that sexual relations really do create a new reality by binding people together—“they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Because sex joins two people together in a unique and powerful way, calling it casual is not appropriate.

A second rationale for freedom suggests that when a man and a woman love one another, sex is the natural and appropriate response. The Bible says, “Love is patient, love is kind . . . love is not self-seeking” (1 Cor. 13:4-5). In a pre-marriage relationship, patience and self-control are a much better measure of real love than personal gratification.

Some suggest that marriage is so complex that it ends up complicating a relationship rather than



complementing it. The truth is that celebrating the marriage commitment both affirms and confirms a couple’s partnership (Mark 10:6-8). A committed covenant relationship is superior to a relationship of convenience because it provides clarity and security.

Others suggest that living together is a good test run. Just living together to make a sexual relationship convenient will result in clouded thinking rather than clear thinking. A healthy courtship and appropriate personality inventories maximized through premarital counseling are much more reliable in discovering compatibility.

{ Justifying living together }

Pragmatists will sometimes lean on the economic expediency rationale. Two can live cheaper than one, they say. While this may be partially true, there are other matters even more important. Biblical perspective and clearer thinking indicate that emotional and spiritual health are more important than saving money. The Bible plainly warns against seeing money as the motivational bottom line (1 Tim. 6:10).

