

*Don't Do Stupid: Marriage Edition*  
*Living Together First*  
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**TALK IT OVER**

Key Scripture:

**1 Thessalonians 4:3 (NLT)**

*3 God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin.*

**1 Thessalonians 4:4-8 (NLT)**

*4 Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor—5 not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways. 6 Never harm or cheat a fellow believer in this matter by violating his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. 7 God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives.*

*8 Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

**Genesis 2:21-24 (NLT)**

*21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.*

*23 "At last!" the man exclaimed.*

*"This one is bone from my bone,  
and flesh from my flesh!*

*She will be called 'woman,'  
because she was taken from*

*'man.' "*

*24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.*

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Have you ever lived with someone you're not married to? What was your reason for that choice?

Start **sharing**. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3.** What is God's will for your life? What does holiness look like in your life as a single person or as a married one?
- **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8.** Contrast a life of self control vs a life of lustful passion. What are the long term repercussions of both? What pre-decisions have to be made to live a life of self control?
- Does it surprise you that 70% of people who get married live with someone before they get married? Why is the percentage of people so high?
- Pastor Troy said that couples who cohabit before marriage have much higher divorce rates. What do you think are some of the reasons for that higher divorce rate?
- What would you say to the person who says, "Marriage is no big deal. It's just a piece of paper and a ceremony?" What would God say to that? See **Genesis 2:21-24** for reference on the first marriage.
- What did Paul mean by "harming or cheating a fellow believer" through sexual sin?
- How would you advise someone who is currently cohabitating?
- If you are single and dating your way, what can your small group or GC do to help you date and marry God's way?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Identify one area of sexual sin in your life, confess it, and ask God's help in repenting of that sin.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Give thanks and praise to God that He has revealed His will to you, that you will live in holiness. Confess where you have fallen short and disobeyed Him, and ask for His continued strength and guidance.

**Question: "Is it wrong for a couple to live together before marriage (cohabitation)?"**

**Answer:** The answer to this question depends somewhat on what is meant by “living together.” If “living together” simply means sharing the same house or apartment, with no sexual connotation, then, no, it is not technically wrong. Strictly speaking, there is nothing sinful about an unmarried man and an unmarried woman living in the same house or apartment, as long as there is no sex taking place. However, that is not what is commonly meant by the term *living together*, which is often used as a euphemism for “having sex before marriage,” synonymous with *shacking up*. The Oxford Dictionary defines *live together* as “share a home and have a sexual relationship.” Rightly or wrongly, the sex is assumed.

For the purposes of this article, we will define *living together* or *cohabiting* as “sharing a home and having a sexual relationship.” Using that definition of *living together*, it is definitely wrong. Premarital sex is condemned in Scripture, along with all other forms of sexual immorality (Acts 15:20; Romans 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5; Jude 1:7). The Bible promotes complete abstinence outside of (and before) marriage. Sex before marriage is just as wrong as adultery and other forms of sexual immorality because they all involve having sex with someone to whom you are not married.

We live in a world that is increasingly supportive of couples living together before marriage. According to a 2016 Barna study, the most common justification for living together is to evaluate compatibility (84 percent); other reasons include saving on rent (5 percent) and other practical considerations (9 percent) ([www.barna.com/research/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation](http://www.barna.com/research/majority-of-americans-now-believe-in-cohabitation), accessed 9/15/21). This acceptance of living together is found even among practicing Christians, of whom 41 percent say cohabitation is “a good idea” (*ibid.*). In 2019, Pew Research found that 58 percent of white evangelicals approve of cohabitation if the couple plans to marry (cited in [www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/christians-and-cohabitation-what-you-need-to-know.html](http://www.crosswalk.com/family/marriage/christians-and-cohabitation-what-you-need-to-know.html), accessed 9/15/21). Despite current trends that approve of living together, the Bible’s message stays the same: God forbids sex before marriage.

In addition to the biblical guidance are other sound reasons not to cohabit. The idea that living together is an appropriate “test-drive relationship” before committing to marriage falls apart under scrutiny. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, living together before marriage does *not* make a future marriage stronger. One study based on a national survey found that couples who had lived together were 46 percent more likely to divorce than other couples (DeMaris, A., and Rao, K. V., “Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54, 1992, based on the National Survey of Families and Households, 178–190). Another study released through Rutgers University found that cohabiting is counterproductive to long-lasting marriages and recommended that unmarried couples avoid living together, especially if the arrangement involves children, due to the uncertainty and tenuousness of cohabitation (Popenoe, D., and Whitehead, B. D., “Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation before Marriage,” *The National Marriage Project*, the Next Generation Series, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 1999).

If a couple is living together outside of marriage, they have three basic options: (1) continue to live together; (2) find separate living quarters; or (3) get married now. Many couples choose to get married in a quick, private ceremony to make things “legal,” and then have a more formal, church-type wedding celebration later. Of those three options, (2) and (3) are the only godly choices.