

## **“A Scriptural Perspective On Marriage”**

To: All Couples Considering Marriage @ Riverside Community Church

We believe marriage to be the first institution that God ordained and it is a sacred, covenantal relationship. Therefore, we hold firmly to the conviction that in order to have a healthy marriage a couple must spend time before they are married investing in their marriage. We are committed to assisting you in every way we can to build a strong foundation that will make your marriage last.

As you prepare for marriage, you are embarking on one of the most exciting journeys of your lifetime. Marriage is also one of the most challenging endeavors a person can undertake and, as statistics tell us, an endeavor which by no means carries with it a guarantee of success.

Looking forward to marriage, your most prominent feeling at this moment may be excitement. You are excited about the potential depth and fulfillment of your marriage relationship. Perhaps you are excited about plans to have children. You are excited because you feel warm and wonderful emotions toward the person you are proposing to spend a lifetime with.

The excitement, enthusiasm, and positive attitude you have about your partner, soon to be spouse, are all good. But these highly motivating feelings also carry with them one drawback. Some research suggests that the “least teachable” time in the life of a couple is the period spanning from six months before the marriage to six months after the marriage. For some this period may be shorter, but in the majority of cases you would expect a couple to be somewhere in the midst of it when they come to their pastor to prepare for the event of marriage and plan all the particulars concerning the ceremony itself. This period of time is labeled “least teachable” because couples are so enthused about their coming marriage, and so positive about their relationship partner, that they are often unable to take a clear realistic look at that relationship in an effort to plan adequately for the challenges that marriage will bring.

So what's the point? No one wants to diminish the ecstasy of your love relationship, however as you prepare for marriage you will serve the durability of that relationship best by working hard to look realistically at the challenges which marriage offers. You will want to be honest and open about your concerns as well as your enthusiasm. You will want to make every effort to plan for the practical challenges of marriage like money management. You will want to work hard at developing communications skills that will enhance this relationship over the long term. You will want to discuss issues of religion, personalities, parenting, and in-laws frankly and forthrightly.

Since taking this kind of thorough look at your relationship is in direct contrast to the “wow, isn't it great to be in love” feelings that you are probably experiencing right now, it is important for you each to make a deliberate commitment to do so. Let that commitment be one of your first to the quality of your coming marriage.

You will notice that in the Premarital Counseling Application there are two questions which deal with matters of utmost importance in the decision to marry. One deals with your personal relationship with Christ and the other deals with matters of intimacy. We'd like to address both of those areas in the following pages.

The Scriptures teach that followers of Christ should marry only followers of Jesus. This makes sense if you really think it through. When a person who longs to honor God with their life

marries someone who isn't interested in the things of the Lord, it brings nothing but heartache and pain to both parties. And the conflict that ensues is often passed on to children.

<sup>14</sup> Don't be teamed with those who do not love the Lord, for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness? <sup>15</sup> And what harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a Christian be a partner with one who doesn't believe? <sup>16</sup> And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For you are God's temple, the home of the living God, and God has said of you, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people."

**2 Corinthians 6:14-16 (TLB)**

We want to help you both become fully devoted followers of Christ. But if one of you doesn't desire that then please know that we will adhere to what the Scriptures teach. We will do everything we can to help you have a healthy start but we will not join you in marriage. (In addition to what the Scriptures teach, we are also forbidden to marry a believer and a non-believer by our denomination, the Assemblies of God.)

The second question that often results in further conversation involves the intimacy aspects of your relationship. One of the trends we see today is that couples are coming to us while they are living together and/or currently sexually active. With that in mind we have found it helpful to clearly address these issues at the initial stages of the wedding ceremony process.

Depending on where you are in your spiritual journey, you may or may not have any idea what God thinks, or the Scriptures teach, about these matters. But because you are coming to us to be joined for life before God, we assume you want to please Him in your relationship.

Thus, the remaining pages of this document will help you to understand the Biblical standards of remaining pure until the day you are united as husband and wife. Please understand this is not meant to condemn you as a couple. (Remember, as your pastors we were all engaged once too!) It is simply to help you wrestle with these issues and it will provide a framework for our initial conversation.

The institution of Marriage began in the first book of the Bible. It was God's idea and He is the inventor of sex.

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ... <sup>21</sup> 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 closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> 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." <sup>24</sup> For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

**Genesis 2:18-25 (NIV)**

Intimacy within marriage was meant to be a wonderful thing! When two people are joined they become "one flesh." But from the onset, it was to be only within the confines of one man and one woman in a union for life. The boundaries He placed upon it are for our pleasure, not our pain.

If you track the sanctity of marriage through the pages of Scripture you'll see clearly the pattern that sex, outside of marriage, is a bad idea ...

Oh, let me warn you ... Don't excite love, don't stir it up, until the time is ripe—and you're ready.

**Song of Songs 2:7 (MSG)**

I charge you ... Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

**Song of Songs 3:5 (NIV)**

Promise me ... not to awaken love until the time is right.

**Song of Songs 8:4 (NLT)**

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ <sup>28</sup> But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

**Matthew 5:27-30 (NLT)**

<sup>13</sup> Let us live in a right way, like people who belong to the day. We should not have wild parties or get drunk. There should be no sexual sins of any kind, no fighting or jealousy. <sup>14</sup> But clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and forget about satisfying your sinful self.

**Romans 13:13-14 (NCV)**

<sup>16</sup> There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one." <sup>17</sup> Since we want to become spiritually one with the Master, we must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever—the kind of sex that can never "become one." <sup>18</sup> There is a sense in which sexual sins are different from all others. In sexual sin we violate the sacredness of our own bodies, these bodies that were made for God-given and God-modeled love, for "becoming one" with another. <sup>19</sup> Or didn't you realize that your body is a sacred place, the place of the Holy Spirit? Don't you see that you can't live however you please, squandering what God paid such a high price for? The physical part of you is not some piece of property belonging to the spiritual part of you. <sup>20</sup> God owns the whole works. So let people see God in and through your body.

**1 Corinthians 6:16-20 (MSG)**

<sup>3</sup> Don't allow love to turn into lust, setting off a downhill slide into sexual promiscuity, filthy practices, or bullying greed.

**Ephesians 5:3 (MSG)**

<sup>5</sup> So put all evil things out of your life: sexual sinning, doing evil, letting evil thoughts control you, wanting things that are evil, and greed. This is really serving a false god.

<sup>6</sup> These things make God angry.

**Colossians 3:5-6 (NCV)**

<sup>3</sup> God wants you to be holy, so don't be immoral in matters of sex. <sup>4</sup> Respect and honor your wife. <sup>5</sup> Don't be a slave of your desires or live like people who don't know God. <sup>6</sup> You must not cheat any of the Lord's followers in matters of sex. Remember, we warned you that he punishes everyone who does such things. <sup>7</sup> God didn't choose you to be filthy, but to be pure. <sup>8</sup> So if you don't obey these rules, you are not really disobeying us. You are disobeying God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 (CEV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations? <sup>2</sup> Certainly—but only within a certain context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. <sup>3</sup> The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. <sup>4</sup> Marriage is not a place to "stand up for your rights." Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out. <sup>5</sup> Abstaining from sex is permissible for a period of time if you both agree to it, and if it's for the purposes of prayer and fasting—but only for such times. Then come back together again. Satan has an ingenious way of tempting us when we least expect it. <sup>6</sup> I'm not, understand, commanding these periods of abstinence—only providing my best counsel if you should choose them.

**1 Corinthians 7:1-6 (MSG)**

<sup>4</sup> Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband. God draws a firm line against casual and illicit sex.

**Hebrews 13:4 (MSG)**

<sup>12</sup> Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

**1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters.

**1 Timothy 5:2 (NLT)**

With those passages guiding us it's clear how God feels about sex outside of marriage. And it's interesting to note that these themes from Scripture are further validated by sources outside of the Bible. Consider these statistics that come from surveys regarding the impact that living together prior to marriage has on couples (from Dr. Kevin Leman's book, "Sheet Music – Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage" pgs. 17-18) ...

1. A national study of over 1,800 married couples indicated that the probability of getting a divorce was twice as high for couples who had cohabited prior to marriage compared to those couples who had not. In addition, cohabitation prior to marriage related to lower levels of subsequent marital interaction and higher levels of marital disagreement and instability.<sup>1</sup>
2. A study of 3,884 Canadian women indicated that women who had cohabited before marriage were 50% more likely to get a divorce than women who had not cohabited before marriage. Of the cohabiting women, 35% could be expected to divorce within 15 years of marriage compared to only 19% among those who had not cohabited prior to marriage.<sup>2</sup>

3. A study of 4,300 Swedish women ages 20-44 indicated that those who had cohabited before marriage had divorce rates that were 80% higher than women who had not cohabited before marriage.<sup>3</sup>
4. A study using a nationally representative sample of 1,235 women ages 20-37 indicated that married women who had cohabited prior to marriage were 3.3 times more likely to have sex with someone other than their husband than married women who had not cohabited prior to marriage. Single women who cohabited 1.7 times more likely to have a secondary sex partner than single women who did not live with their partners.<sup>4</sup>

The average marriage today lasts just seven years. The bottom line? Marriage is tough enough when we don't live together and we are pure before marriage. We don't want your marriage to fail. That's why we're so steadfast in our conviction to help you make wise choices now.

Please remember, our goal is to help you become fully devoted followers of Christ. In this case that means you'll need to separate from each other and cease to be intimate until your wedding day. We realize this is radical in our society today but there are clear guidelines from the Scriptures that we follow. We know you aren't perfect and we'll work with you to make the necessary changes that will need to occur should you make the decision to separate. And once again, in addition to what the Scriptures teach, our denomination has specific guidelines on these matters for us to follow.

We look forward to talking with you about these matters in detail when you are ready. In the meantime, please know we are praying for you and asking God to help you live a life that truly pleases Him and is a blessing to others around you!

Sincerely,

The Pastors of RCC

<sup>1</sup>Alan Booth and David Johnson, "Premarital Co-habitation and Marital Success," *Journal of Family Issues* 9 (1988): 261-270. This citation is taken from Wade Horn, *Father Facts* (Gaithersburg, Md.: The National Fatherhood Initiative, third edition, no date given), 46ff.

<sup>2</sup>T.R. Balakrishnan et al., "A Hazard Model of the Covariates of Marriage Dissolution in Canada," *Demography* 24 (1987): 395-406.

<sup>3</sup>Neil Bennett, Ann Klimas Blanc, and David E. Bloom, "Commitment and the Modern Union: Assessing the Link Between Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Instability," *American Sociological Review* 53 (1988): 127-138.

<sup>4</sup>Renata Forste and Koray Tanfer, "Sexual Exclusivity among Dating, Cohabiting, and Married Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (1996): 33-47.

*Numerous studies have been done on this subject of cohabitation and its impact on marriage. A simple internet search will provide statistics that are even more recent than those listed in this article.*