

to 29 years old. Can you be sure your “significant other” will continue to live with and provide support for the family after a child is born if he isn’t committed enough to marry you?

### Is marriage sacred?

According to some, marriage isn’t a sacred ritual anymore. To them, it is just a man-made step in a relationship, so it shouldn’t matter if people live together before marriage. *If* evolution did blindly develop these wonderful bodies we call male and female, that might be so.

However, if God—who also designed marriage and family—is our Creator, then we must consider His in-

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*The loving bond of marriage offers a beautiful analogy of Jesus Christ and the Church.*

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structions. His commands forbidding sexual relationships outside of the bonds of marriage are not hard to find or understand (Exodus 20:14; Galatians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 6:18).

Furthermore, if you believe, as the apostle Paul did, that the loving bond of marriage offers a beautiful analogy of Jesus Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32), give careful thought. Before living together, seriously think of the consequences—to your emotions, to your health, to your chances of marital success and to your relationship with God.

Most of those who read the foreboding statistics about the cohabitation effect pay no attention. It seems each person feels his or her situation is different—he or she will be one of those who will find true, lasting happiness. But our loving Creator knows that is not true. He wants to save us from the negative consequences. How would you explain your choice to Him?

Avoid the cohabitation effect and instead choose the path supported by research. Choose the path ordained and supported by the Creator of all mankind! As one happy husband wrote: “My wife was a great treasure which I had to patiently wait for. She was burned into my heart and mind as this priceless jewel from the start.”

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Life Hope & Truth

## Living Together Before Marriage

*More couples are living together before marriage. But statistics show the “cohabitation effect” is not what they expected. What does our Creator say?*

Despite the fact that individuals who live together before marriage have a greater rate of divorce than those who do not, many who read the statistics simply don’t believe it. They do not believe their chances of divorce increase if they live together before marriage.

### Living-together facts

Surveys show that there is a negative “cohabitation effect”—couples who live together before marriage “tend to be less satisfied with their marriages—and



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more likely to divorce—than couples who do not” (Meg Jay, *New York Times*, “The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage,” April 14, 2012).

In spite of this, the majority of people who responded to this article declared they would still choose to live together before marriage. Many expressed the belief that living together before marriage could help them better determine whether they would be happily mar-

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*Sexual activity before or outside of marriage brings a high risk of contracting a sexually transmissible disease.*

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ried. They believe their experiences will be different—they will be the exceptions to the rule.

Some felt there must be something wrong with the statistics because it would only stand to reason that living together before marriage makes sense. After all, you want to be sure your love is strong enough to eventually marry, and the only way to find out is to live together, or so many believe.

Whatever the justification, it seems that living-together relationships don’t often work out. Various surveys tell us that at least 50 percent and up to 70 percent of those who eventually marry have lived with someone else before marriage. The overwhelming reason given for cohabiting before marriage is to test the relationship before making the commitment of marriage.

From a human perspective, the rationale for living together before marriage may make sense. But what if living together really isn’t better for strengthening your future marriage? Let’s ask a few questions to help find the answer.

### **What are the health risks?**

Is having a sexual relationship before marriage healthy?

There are at least 19 million new cases of sexually trans-

missible diseases in the United States every year. Women are infected two times more often than men.

Other studies show that 80 percent of young people are sexually active before marriage. It is no secret that sexual activity before or outside of marriage brings a high risk of contracting a sexually transmissible disease. By their late teenage years, at least three-fourths of all U.S. teens have had intercourse, and more than two-thirds of all sexually experienced teens have had two or more partners (“Sexual and Reproductive Health: Women and Men,” October 2002, [guttmacher.org](http://guttmacher.org)).

Each year, about 12,000 women get cervical cancer in the United States. Almost all of these cancers are related to the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus (HPV). This cancer often takes years to develop after a woman becomes infected.

Once infected by an STD, your chances of passing it along to a new partner are extremely high! And with so many people having multiple sexual partners, the spread of STDs has become almost epidemic.

And these factors don’t even take into consideration the emotional and psychological issues associated with disease or the impact of unwanted pregnancy. Are these chances you’re willing to take?

### **Involvement versus commitment**

Are you sure you want to live with someone who is not committed?

Living together is involvement. Marriage is commitment. “Studies done by Pamela Smock, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Michigan, reveal that there might be a fundamental difference in the way men and women perceive cohabitation: Women tend to view it as a step before marriage to that partner, whereas men tend to see living together as something they do before making any commitment” (“Living Together: Do Men and Women Perceive It Differently?” [ivillage.com](http://ivillage.com)).

To illustrate, consider the advice one young man was

given by another man: “Why buy the cow if you get the milk free?” Are women compromising their values in search of possible future security, while actually reducing the chances of a committed marriage?

In response to *The New York Times* article, a male who was only interested in sexual relations stated, “Of course this would be simpler if my girlfriend and me [sic] could just continue as is but, as is always the case (in my relationships) she wants to build a nest for us.” Perhaps this woman should reconsider their relationship altogether!

Couples who moved in together because it was convenient or because they felt they needed a trial period are the ones who tend to get divorced most often if they marry.

### **Additional consequences of living together before marriage**

Have you considered the consequences of having a child out of wedlock?

The Witherspoon Institute, a conservative think tank out of Princeton, New Jersey, issued a report called “Marriage and the Public Good: Ten Principles.” They

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identify four threats to marriage, including cohabitation arrangements. The report states that these arrangements “are not a good alternative to marriage but are a threat, and they surely do not provide a good environment for the rearing of children.”

Nearly 40 percent of babies born in the United States in 2007 were delivered by unwed mothers, according to data released by the National Center for Health Statistics. The highest percentage was among women 25