

Jimmy Evans Responds to Pew Research's Disturbing Findings About Cohabitation Before Marriage

In the fall of 2019, the Pew Research Center revealed some discouraging but unsurprising news about marriage. The number of adults who have lived with a romantic partner, outside marriage, is now higher than the number of adults who have ever been married.

That wasn't the case 20 years ago. But today, nearly 70% of U.S. adults now say it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together—even if they don't plan to get married.

At the same time, the percentage of adults who are currently married has declined by 5% since 1995, while the share of adults living with an unmarried partner has gone up 4%. Marriage is declining. Cohabitation is increasing.

I imagine many readers are now asking, "What's wrong with that? Why not take a relationship for a short 'test drive' before committing to a lifelong marriage?"

Leaving aside the moral response to this question—I definitely believe sex outside of marriage falls outside God's plan—I'd like to address the importance of commitment in marriage. Couples who commit to one another through marriage can enjoy much greater intimacy than those who are unwilling to commit.

In fact, couples who only live together after marriage are statistically more likely to have a successful union, compared to cohabiting couples who eventually marry. In 2018, the *Journal of Marriage and Family* published a study linking cohabitation to a higher risk of divorce. Couples who live

together first, before marriage, are less likely to divorce in their first year of marriage, but more likely to divorce after five years.

My new book, *The Four Laws of Love*, details the guidelines God established for marriage. By following these laws, we can ensure success in marriage. We can discover greater intimacy and satisfaction in this relationship when we start it the way God intended.

One of these four laws is the law of purity. The first words God spoke concerning marriage were in the Garden of Eden, as revealed in Genesis 2. These words are no doubt familiar to you: "They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25).

Adam and Eve were completely exposed to each other. They were naked—not just physically, but spiritually and emotionally. We were not created to expose ourselves completely to anyone else we meet in our lives, but our spouses are the exception. No other human relationship affords the potential for so much intimacy.

That's why we are so drawn to marriage specifically and romantic relationships in general: Because God created us with a need for intimacy. Intimacy is the prize of marriage! But true intimacy—"nakedness" of body, soul and spirit—can only occur in an atmosphere of commitment.

Both physically and spiritually, most humans are hesitant to get naked in an unprotected atmosphere. Full exposure means opening up and revealing ourselves, but this has to happen in an atmosphere of trust.

Trust requires commitment. We won't open our hearts to someone we fear might desert us. That's why we say "Til death do us part" in traditional marriage vows. It means, "I'm here to stay." Without that level of commitment, intimacy is elusive.

Obviously, living together outside of the marriage covenant does not offer the same commitment. You haven't pledged "for better or worse." You might have committed to each other physically, but the spiritual or emotional component is lacking.

A cohabiting relationship will never be a truly safe, protected place because it is, by nature, temporary. A man or woman may long to expose themselves to each other without shame or fear, but the lack of commitment prevents it. What if I reveal my innermost thoughts and he rejects me? What if I open myself up to her and she can't handle it? What if she leaves me? Without the commitment of marriage, true nakedness may be accompanied by fear.

Marriage is better. God created it as the place for our need for intimacy to be met. That's why Adam and Eve's nakedness in the Garden was so beautiful. It was untainted by sin. Only after sin entered the relationship did their nakedness become associated with shame and fear.

Sin is the greatest obstacle to openness in a relationship. That word refers to any behavior the Bible says is wrong, from sexual sin to selfishness and dominance. But every little sin—including the sin of sex outside marriage—can give the devil a foothold to destroy a relationship.

A cohabiting relationship has already violated God's law of purity. Whether it eventually leads to marriage or not, it will always struggle to achieve true intimacy.

The secret to a healthy marriage isn't a "trial run" before tying the knot. It's to follow the "Four Laws of Love" and base your relationship on a solid commitment. All of us long for inner closeness with another person. The best way to find it is through God's plan for marriage. {eoa}

Jimmy Evans is the founder and CEO of MarriageToday, a ministry and nationally syndicated television program devoted

to helping couples thrive in strong and fulfilling marriages and families. He is senior pastor of Gateway Church, one of the largest churches in the nation. He and his wife Karen have been married for 47 years and have two married children and five grandchildren.

This is an excerpt from *The Four Laws of Love: Guaranteed Success for Every Married Couple* by Jimmy Evans. He shares that God created love and marriage, and He created laws to guide and guard them. When God's laws are honored, marriage is the safest relationship on the earth. Available now at .