

Living Together or Letting God Supply Your Spouse?

USA Today recently published the results of a national survey among 18- to 31-year-olds regarding cohabitation. A whopping 76 percent of young Americans said living together before marriage is fine. The stark reality is that 65 percent of “altar-bound” singles—many of whom identify as Christians—now live together before marriage, a euphemism for lifestyle fornication.

Recently, the Pope made reference to cohabitation in a statement that is leaving some confused. Pope Francis stated that “matrimony is between a man and a woman” but that moves to “regulate diverse situations of cohabitation [are] driven by the need to regulate aspects among persons, as for instance to assure medical care.” Multitudes are uncertain regarding the extent of what he was suggesting or saying in this statement.

Add to the conversation on people living together are people making statements like the following: “Look, times have changed. We have to face certain realities of living in the 21st century. We’re older ... more mature ... been divorced ... not ready financially... providing parents to a child ... benefiting from tax incentives ... have peace that God understands our unique situation. After all, look how many celebrities and even Christians are doing it.”

Does it matter?

Let’s answer the question by stating it from a biblical perspective. Since God ordained marriage as the first institution, even before family, church and government; since He took the initiative to bring the first man He created to his wife; since He filled the Scriptures with practical principles and commands to ensure its success; and since He intends marriage to be an eternal picture of the beautiful, relationship between Christ and His church (Eph. 5:31-32), we

are not given the luxury to dishonor God by deviating from His divine blueprint for this sacred institution. Society does so to its own peril—something we are witnessing today in America.

“So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed” (Eph. 4:17-19, NIV).

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people” (Eph. 5:3).

Here’s the deal: Couples who are shacking up, living under one roof as a pretend married couple, are violating God’s will for marriage no matter what their rationalization is economically, philosophically or spiritually. It is a sinful pattern of behavior and must be repented of immediately. This includes those who say they are not “going all the way” sexually or that they reside in separate rooms, deceived that they are immune to temptation or that neighbors don’t form impressions based on appearances nullifying their Christian witness. To ignore this will bring consequences—if not immediately, eventually.

Having said the above, the good news is that our Creator has a plan to bring men and women together in the sacrament of holy matrimony. In a little more than two years, my wife and I will celebrate 40 years of covenant marriage on the heels of her parents, who are at the 68-year mark. It began when we embraced the *Manufacturer’s Handbook* (the Bible) and made a quality decision to carefully follow what it says. We invite you to follow us on this pathway to success.

Irv Gordon’s Volvo just passed the 3 million mark in mileage! He stated that the secret to his success was to follow from

day one the specific plan in the manufacturer's handbook.

Consider the following scriptural insights to help any single man or woman discover their God-ordained mate.

10 Biblical Guidelines for Gaining God's Mate for Your Life

1. Make sure Jesus Christ is Lord over your life. There simply is no biblical basis for saying "Jesus Christ is my Savior" but not your Lord. Lordship means uncompromising obedience to what He commands. The key is understanding who the Person is behind the commandments—that He loves us and has nothing but the best in store for us.

2. Commit to live a life of moral purity. In the area of sex, God has put limitations on the display of physical affection prior to marriage because He wants us to experience a maximum marriage built upon a proper foundation of love, respect and covenantal commitment. God's plan is chastity (purity) before marriage and fidelity (loyalty) after marriage. Chastity is not a negative principle. It is keeping sex in the right place for the right person at the right time. Remember: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12, NKJV).

3. Trust your heavenly Father and live by faith. Christians are called to live by faith, without which we cannot please God (Heb. 11:6). Nothing so reflects the depth of your trust in God as the choice of a life partner. Like Abraham did with Isaac, lay all preconceived notions and timetables on the altar, and believe God that He will bring the right person at the right time.

4. Be intentional in the process. "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov. 18:22). Everything begins by asking God to help you discern your mate, but then you cannot remain passive. A man has to provide for his household; therefore, discovering God's will for your career path is extremely important. No fellow has the right to invite a woman into his confusion!

Don't super-spiritualize things. Make sure proper attention is given to cultivating both spiritual and physical disciplines, paying proper attention to physical appearance, demonstrating the attractiveness of a servant's heart, maintaining a healthy work/life balance, and learning basic time management skills as well as basic principles of financial stewardship that will pay off handsomely in a marriage. Remember, marriage does not create problems so much as it reveals them!

A passage that God gave to my wife and me was, "Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field, and after that build your house" (Prov. 24:27, ESV).

5. Keep your focus on Jesus, not on finding a mate. When Paul was asked by single young men regarding this subject, he cautioned them to "live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:35, NIV).

God does not want us getting all bent out of shape trying to discover who our life partner is. He wants us to first find rest and security in a relationship with Him. Walking around nervously like a turkey while going through the mental gymnastics of being preoccupied looking for our "phantom hero" (with our 66-point checklist from the hottest dating site) is not only exhausting but also a clever tool of the enemy to get our eyes off Jesus.

Right now, the most important question is not "Will I ever be married?" Instead, it's a two-part query: "What is God's will for my life now?" and then, "Am I doing it?"

Trying to hurry the process can cause lots of mistakes. Proverbs 19:2 tells us, "Whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way" (ESV).

6. Differentiate between loneliness and being alone. Feelings of loneliness are a normal part of life. Whether single or married, we all have times where we experience the emotion of loneliness. Yet for the Christian who has learned the secret of abiding in God as Jesus described in John 15, we can say as our Lord Himself said, "You will leave me all alone. Yet I am

not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 16:32, NIV).

I still remember a conversation I had with a delightful woman who got married at the age of 41. She was beaming, since she had waited so long for God to bring her into a covenant marriage with a tremendous man of God. She looked me in the eyes and smiled and told me these words which I've never forgotten: "Larry, it would be far better to be single in the will of God and experience some moments of loneliness than to be married out of the will of God and experience a lifetime of chaos."

7. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14, NKJV). The New Testament tells us clearly that a Christian is only to marry another Christian. "

- A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39, ESV).
- "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3, NKJV).
- "Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts" (2 Tim. 2:22, LB).

God's people under the Old Covenant were forbidden to take foreign wives (Deut. 7:3) and repeatedly suffered the judgment of God when they disregarded this directive. (See Ezra 10.)

Genesis 24:1-4 directs the people of God not to take Canaanites for spouses. Someone has said a Canaanite is someone who is selfish and lives to please himself as a nonbeliever. The word looks like *canine*. In other words, a relationship with a Canaanite is puppy love that can be a prelude to a dog's life! Ask the multitudes who disregarded God's Word here and suffered terribly.

8. Celebrate the gift of singleness if God has uniquely chosen you. The overwhelming majority of people are designed to marry, have children and populate this world for the glory of God. Yet some people have a distinct calling to a life of

singleness because of the unique task that God has for them.

In Matthew 19:12, Jesus described individuals who have this unique calling and receive it. Paul himself was a single man and told us of this special gift. He said by divine revelation that the one who can accept this should accept it (1 Cor. 7:7).

In the past generation, people said that if the Protestants had a pope, he certainly would have been John Stott from England. Stott had tremendous impact and lived his life as a single man of God. Think of the phenomenal ministry that Mother Teresa had in her lifetime as a single woman who voluntarily chose the path given her as a single Christian.

As you read this, if you're wondering if you may have this gift yet have a burning desire to be married one day, let's get real and admit: Most likely, you ain't got it!

9. Concentrate on developing friendship. Throughout my more than 40 years of Christian ministry, I have discovered that the core component of a successful Christian marriage is a strong friendship base. Therefore, focus on deepening friendships with members of both sexes to develop character, plus broaden your ability to deal with life situations and diverse people.

It is a sad reality that while Christians have many brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, many really don't have genuine friends. As conditions continue to disintegrate in our culture, increasingly we need to realize how much we need to develop the gift of friendship—individually and in group situations, which have the benefit of eliminating the pressure of the solitary “dating game.”

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up” (Eccl. 4:9-10).

10. Enjoy Jesus! These were the dying words given me by Eileen

Wallis on her deathbed. She was the wife of one of the most influential Christian leaders in Great Britain over the past century. Let's take these words to heart whatever season of life we're in—married or single.

Psalm 37:4 encourages us with this breathtaking promise: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." If you'll have desires toward God, you'll gain desires from God! You'll have assurance in your heart regarding your future, and you will discern His will, His way and His timing regarding this major area of your life.

In order to know His choice, you have to be able to hear His voice! So stay close to Him and rest secure in your Bridegroom's unconditional love for you as His bride. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and He will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).

Larry Tomczak is a best-selling author and cultural commentator with more than 41 years of trusted ministry experience. His passion is to bring perspective, analysis and insight from a biblical worldview. He loves awakening people to today's cultural realities and responses needed for a restored, influential church. Please visit .