



## Marriage Covenant Agreement

**Biblical Marriage Relationship** The biblical picture of marriage is a formal commitment and covenant resulting in a man and a woman becoming one family that can only be separated by death (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6). This act of publicly leaving one's family (ceremony) and becoming "one flesh" involves sexual intercourse (1 Corinthians 6:18). Sex is intended to be enjoyed only within the marriage covenant. From an Old Testament perspective, scripture speaks out against sex outside of marriage 93 times, primarily ending with severe consequences (Leviticus 20:10-21; Exodus 20:14).

Similarly, in John 4:16-18 Jesus speaks of the issue of cohabitation directly. As Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman, he referenced the fact that the man she lived with was not her husband. Based on his interaction with the woman, Jesus clearly did not approve of her living situation.

The theme of sexual purity is also repeated throughout Acts and the Epistles. In Acts 15:20, the apostle James instructs new believers to abstain from sexual immorality. Similarly, the author of Hebrews states that marriage must be honored among all and a person's sexual life should be kept pure (Hebrews 13:4). For further support, see Galatians 5:19, 1 Corinthians 6:13-20, Ephesians 5:3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

**Cohabitation in our Society** Cohabitation can be defined as a couple that lives together before marriage. Both the percentage of couples living together and moral acceptance of cohabitation are increasing among evangelical Christians. The primary reason is fear, derived from a divorce rate that has more than tripled in the last 50 years leaving two generations with a very real fear of broken homes and broken marriages. This leads couples to want to "test drive" living together without any formal commitment.

While on the surface it sounds like a good idea, the negative consequences of cohabitation are validated in secular studies. The Center for Disease Control indicates that 80% of all couples who live together and get married will end up divorced. Couples that cohabitated before marriage were found to have less positive interactions (higher levels of unresolved conflict), which is a reliable predictor of the relationship's future success or failure. Among cohabitating couples, domestic violence increases by five times the amount of married couples. Abuse, depression, financial hardship, and infidelity of your significant other greatly increase as well. Practically, an individual must be willing to invest a great amount of time, money and other resources in a relationship that statistically only has a 20% chance of surviving.

**Conclusion** Despite growing popularity and practice within the church and culture, we desire to submit to scripture. Regardless of the findings of secular research, it is the conviction of the writers of this curriculum that cohabitation is a biblically sinful decision for individuals and

couples. If a couple decides to continue cohabitating, your church may decline the use of a staff pastor for the marriage ceremony. We also ask that couples who are living together but not having sex to move into separate homes from one another. Scripture tells us to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to place yourself in a living situation that you have the best chance for purity and separation from temptation (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5; Ephesians 5:3; Hebrews 13:4).

## **Premarital Purity Pledge**

We believe that sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed in the context of marriage and that He had our best in mind when He gave us strong directives about sexual purity before marriage. There are many benefits to staying sexually pure before marriage. By waiting until marriage:

- You please God and experience the blessing of obedience.
- You build trust, which is necessary for intimacy.
- You develop the godly qualities of patience and self-control.
- You affirm that you care more for the other person than yourself.
- You protect yourself from feelings of guilt and shame.
- You provide yourself with an example to give your (future) children and others.
- You are protected from emotional, mental and physical trauma should you break off your relationship.
- You develop healthy communication habits and skills.
- You avoid the possibility of an unplanned pregnancy.
- You avoid the possibility of contracting a sexually transmitted disease.
- You increase the anticipation and enjoyment of your wedding night.
- You discover more about each other than just the physical.
- If you are a Christian, you maintain a witness to the world.
- If you are a Christian, you keep from bringing reproach on the name of Christ.

Although many couples believe engaging in sex prior to marriage will strengthen their relationship, we believe the opposite is true. We believe sex outside of marriage can slow down the growth of a couple’s relationship by causing emotional confusion and distracting couples from pursuing activities that would be more meaningful and beneficial during the dating/engagement stage of a relationship. Research indicates a positive relationship between couples who live by biblical standards regarding purity and marriage longevity.

While physical intimacy is of huge importance in a healthy marriage, we do not believe it is the foundation upon which to build a great marriage. Therefore, the aim of this pledge is to help each couple focus on the essential building blocks of establishing a healthy marriage.

What is outlined below is a voluntary pledge, taken by a seriously dating or engaged couple, to sexual purity. This pledge is optional, but strongly encouraged. Therefore, we ask you to consider agreeing to limit your physical involvement, as indicated below, and to be held accountable by your mentor couple.

Sexual purity means much more than not having sexual intercourse before marriage. Many couples avoid intercourse but are still sexually intimate. Scripture defines sexual purity as being morally excellent. And moral excellence means being holy. It means avoiding the appearance of evil. It means purity of thought as well as purity of deed. It means protecting one another's innocence from being stained by impure actions.

Those considering or preparing for marriage are asked by their mentors to talk about the pledge privately and to pray about it before deciding whether to take this step. Regardless of what the decision is, the matter will remain a private one between your mentor and you. Ultimately, however, it is a spiritual matter between you and God.

Be honest about the physical part of your relationship. We know the Bible does not specifically address 'how far a couple can go before marriage,' however, it is clear that we are to flee from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). If you are a follower of Jesus, then you want to live in a way that is radically different from culture. We are not to be conformed by the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:1-2).

### **Commitment Levels**

Consider making a commitment to keeping your physical activities between #1 – #3:

1. Holding hands
2. Hugging
3. Light kissing
4. French kissing
5. Kissing on the neck, ears or other parts of the body
6. Indirect stimulation of the breasts/genitals (e.g. "grinding")
7. Manual stimulation of the breasts/genitals
8. Oral stimulation of the breasts/genitals
9. Intercourse

If your physical activities exceed #3, we suggest the following steps:

- Confess to the Lord, and repent of your actions (Psalm 51.3-4).
- Confess and seek forgiveness from your partner.
- Inform your mentor couple. We recommend the male contact the male leader within 24 hours after exceeding the physical limit. If the man does not do so, the woman should call the female mentor.
- Calling your mentor does not circumvent the need to confess your actions to God; however, letting your mentor know keeps you accountable, so your focus can be on the spiritual, character-building issues that are important in forging a lifelong committed marriage.

We pledge to hold our relationship to a Biblical standard, so the Lord might bless this relationship now, and in the many years ahead. Therefore, we agree to call our mentors if the physical involvement goes beyond level #3.

### **Selected Scripture Related to Sexual Purity**

- 1 Corinthians 6:18: Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.
- Ephesians 5:3: But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8: For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
- Hebrews 13:4: Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.
- Proverbs 6:27-28: Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk with hot coals and his feet not be scorched?

*Obtained from "Preparing for Marriage: Discover God's Plan for a Lifetime of Love" by David Boehi, et al Kahn and London, "Premarital Sex and the Risk of Divorce" in Journal of Marriage and Family (1991) 53:845-855.*