

The Counterfeit Marriage

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[0 : 0 0] God. Please turn to Genesis 2 and 1 Corinthians 7. You can follow your bulletins on the screen or your own Bible. Starting in Genesis 2, 18, we read, Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Then in 1 Corinthians 7, we read, Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, It's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman, but because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.

The husband should give his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

But then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this, I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind, and one of another.

[2 : 0 7] To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it's good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry.

For it's better to marry than to burn with passion. This is the Word of God. Thank you, Joanne. Let's just pray together as we come before God's Word.

Heavenly Father, we gather this morning as a church family with you, Christ, the head of our church. We've come together because we want to worship you and give you the praise that is due to your name.

We come together before you because our hearts were made for you, and we will forever be restless until we find our rest in you. We've come together to hear from you, God.

Lord Jesus, thank you so much that you haven't just left us to our own devices. You've given us your Word, and you've given us your Spirit, and we need both of them. We need your Word to speak life to us.

[3 : 1 2] We need your Spirit to come and write that Word in our hearts, God. And so we pray for both of those this morning, Lord. We pray that you will speak to us from your Word, and we pray that your Spirit will draw near to us.

God, once again, in this series, as we talk about these very real things, we ask God that anything that is not of you, God, I really pray to fall in deaf ears, may it just fall by the wayside.

We are not interested in the opinions of man, whether it's culture or church. We want to know the will of God. We want to walk in your will. So come and speak to us, we pray. Come and have your way.

God, I pray also this morning just that you'll flood us with your gospel grace, God. These very sensitive topics, God, can bring up so much pain. We pray for your grace to wash over us.

And so come, Lord Jesus, come. We pray this in your wonderful and your gracious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. We are going through this series called Gender, Sex, Relationships, and God.

[4 : 1 2] And we're looking at these really big themes and topics of life, themes that actually affect all of us, whether you're married or single or dating or engaged or widowed or divorced.

These themes actually impact all of our lives. And the last two weeks, we've looked at the topic of marriage, two weeks ago, and then last week, we looked at the topic of sex. And I want to encourage you, if you weren't able to listen to those, I really want to ask you to go back onto the

website or YouTube or the app and listen to those talks.

Especially Chris' talk last week, I personally think that that was one of the best sermons I've ever heard on the topic of sex. And I've heard many. And I really want to encourage you, if you missed it, to go and listen to it.

It was outstanding. And I think that will really help us. So I want to encourage you to do that. Now, this morning, we are looking at the topic of cohabitation, which can be defined in many ways. But broadly speaking, I want to include three things under the topic of cohabitation. It mainly means a couple that are dating or in a romantic relationship who are not married and choose to live together, okay, in a romantic relationship, almost like a husband and wife relationship.

[5 : 24] I think I can also include under this umbrella people maybe that are dating and staying over at each other's houses. So on the weekend, it's just easier to stay over rather than go back home and just staying over each other's houses.

And I think a third thing we can include in this is even going away on holidays together and sharing a hotel room. So all of these topics under the theme of cohabitation. Now, as we dive in, I want to just say one thing up front.

If you're married this morning, don't feel like, oh, okay, this is not for me. And, you know, think about your shopping list and the emails you need to send. This is important for all of us. And the reason is because the church is a family.

We're not just a group of individuals. We're a church family. And one of the things about the family is it's a diverse family with people in different stages of life. And the reason God constitutes the church like this is so that we can walk with and encourage each other in different stages of life. And maybe you're here this morning and you're married and you feel like, okay, this doesn't directly apply to me. But actually God's called you to serve the church family as a mentoring role or to walk with the couple that are dating or considering or processing.

[6 : 31] And so I want us as a church family to think what is God's word to us as a family, not just to those people that are on this stage of life. Okay. Next week we're going to continue on this theme as well.

Next week we're going to talk about gender and transgender. And then the week after that's singleness. Okay. So that's where we're going the next little while. Now on April 29th, 2011, I don't guess many of us remember where we were.

It wasn't quite like the Twin Towers or something. But many people on that day, April 29th, 2011, were glued to their TV screens. And the reason is because the second in line to the throne of the King of England, Prince William, married Kate Middleton.

Okay. And millions of people around the world watched the royal wedding of the century. And Prince William and Kate had been living together for a couple of months or years before that. And the Archbishop of York, the second highest official in the Church of England, he supported the couple's decision to live together before marriage. And this is what he said.

[7 : 38] He said, we are living at a time when some people, as my daughter likes to say, want to test whether the milk is good before they buy the cow. Okay. Now, we don't really come from an agrarian society.

What I hear people say is, I want to test drive the car before I buy it. Does that resonate? Does that make sense? Okay. And so, the Archbishop of York says, that's just where we're at in society.

And in many ways, this sums up a lot of our modern culture's view to relationships and marriage and sexuality and that. And so, it'll come as no surprise when we hear that statistically, more and more people are choosing to live together before marriage or instead of marriage.

In the United States, the percentage of people that choose to cohabit, in other words, live together outside of marriage, between the year 2000 and 2010, so just a short period of time, increased 35%.

36% increase in the numbers in a short 10-year period of time. And from 1960 to presently, it has increased 2,000%, so 20-fold the number of people that are choosing to live together.

[8 : 49] But that's true in Hong Kong as well. Between the year of 2011 and 2013, so just a very short two-year period, they did a poll. And the number of people that are actually living together either before marriage or instead of marriage is a good idea, that increased 20%.

So, 20% increase said, actually, I think this is a good idea, in a two-year period, between 2011 and 2013. At the same time, over half of all young adults, 15 to 35 in Hong Kong, agree, no, it's a good

idea that we live together either before marriage or instead of marriage altogether. And so, it's no surprise that in Hong Kong, the marriage rates are in steep decline. The last eight years in a row, the recorded marriages have decreased every year.

And 2019 was the lowest number of marriages since 2003. Okay, so the last 16 years, 2019 was the lowest number. I'm glad to see we've got some people, Justin Annabelle and Zee and Helen, that are trying their best to raise the numbers again and lift the record.

So, we are right behind you guys here in Hong Kong. So, essentially, there's this massive trend across the world, started in the West because of the sexual revolution, 1960s.

[10:03] But moving East as well, where more and more people are choosing, let's just live together rather than actually commit to marriage. And there's a couple of reasons for this. The first reason is because marriage is generally just seen as irrelevant.

What's the point, right? We can just live together. We can live like a married couple. We can enjoy sexual intimacy. We can pool our resources. We can share the burdens of domestic life without the commitment or being tied down or needing to go through the ceremony of a wedding day.

Okay, so it's just seen as this is just simpler and easier. Another reason is because of the hurt and the pain that people have experienced. Maybe somebody grew up in a home where there was a messy divorce or breakdown of family.

And the trauma of that feels like, I don't want to go through that again. And so, it's just, actually, it's just easier. If we live together, then if it doesn't work out, we don't need to go through the trauma of divorce again.

Or maybe some people have gone through divorce. And they don't want to get married again, but they still want companionship. And so, they choose to go through cohabitation. One of the main reasons is before people get married.

[11:12] So, they engage to be married. And they think, listen, if we come together, we can save money just for the couple of months leading up to our wedding. This will be financially beneficial. And we can kind of get our lives in order before the wedding day.

So, pre-nuptial, before marriage. But by far, the biggest reason across all the research is that it's a form. People see it as a form of testing the relationship, right?

So, people are dating. It's serious. We want to see if we think we can get married. Well, the best way to do it is to test and see how compatible we are. So, if we move in together, we can see our lifestyles.

How do you live? How do I live? Whether we're financially compatible, sexually compatible, all sorts of kinds of compatibility. Okay? As Dr. Johnson Thomas said, we want to test the milk before buying the car.

Okay? Test drive the car before you pay down that deposit. What I want us to see today is that even though some of those fears and feelings are really real.

[12:12] And if you've come from a family that's experienced a breakdown in a family, maybe your parents got divorced or you've experienced a divorce, those feelings are real. But as real as those feelings and those fears are, I want us to see that God says that cohabitation is actually like a counterfeit kind of marriage.

It's a counterfeit marriage. And that God's design and pattern is always that the depth of intimacy we experience, both emotional but also sexual and physical, is always to be governed by the depth of commitment that we've made to one another.

And so over and against the idea of cohabitation as a legitimate alternative to marriage or as a precursor to marriage, God calls His people not to live together as a husband and wife kind of relationship before we actually go through our wedding vows and our marriage.

And there's good reasons why God says that. Okay? So this is the big idea today. Even though those feelings are real, those fears are real, actually cohabitation is kind of a counterfeit version of marriage.

It's a substitute for marriage. And it's always going to end in pain and destruction. And God's got good reason why He calls us not to do that. Okay? And I want to give us four reasons for that.

[13:34] I want to give us a biblical reason, an ethical reason, a pragmatic reason, and then a Christian reason. Okay? Biblically, ethically, pragmatically, Christianly.

Okay? So that's where we're going. So first one, let's look at biblically. As we've seen, this is going to be the longest one, then we'll dive into the next three. As we've seen over the last few weeks, in

Scripture, God has a clear design and a purpose for both marriage and sex and sexuality. And what we see is that marriage and sex are intrinsically meant to go together. And when we divorce them from one another, it's always going to end up in pain and destruction. And we see this actually in Genesis 2, the passage that Joanne read to us.

Right in the beginning, God's design, Genesis 2 is the prototype for what marriage should be like before sin enters the world and messes things up. And so we go back to the original design. What was the creator's intention? And we see that in Genesis 2. And there we see, God says, it's not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper fit for him. Okay? And the word helper there is someone who brings their strength to cover your weaknesses.

[14 : 43] It's a compatibility, a complementarity. And then God says, therefore, a man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Okay? And so we see here a clear order. It's leave father and mother, be united to your wife, cling to your wife, and then shameless, joyful intimacy, naked intimacy.

Okay? There's a clear pattern and an order. And in the New Testament, when people come to Jesus and ask him about marriage and divorce and how does this thing work, Jesus goes back to Genesis 2, to this pattern, and says, well, let's go back to the original author's intention.

Let's see what the design was. And he quotes this passage. Leave father and mother, be united to your wife, and then joyful, free, shameless intimacy. Okay? And we see the same thing in Corinthians 7 that Joanne read to us.

What's happening in Corinthians, there's some unusual situation going on there. We don't know what it is. But later on, he writes and he says, because of the present distressful situation. So there's something going on in Corinth.

[15 : 47] It could be that there's persecution. It could be there's something that's causing angst in the community. And there's some people that are engaged to be married. And so they're saying to Paul, well, what should we do?

Should we get married quickly? Should we hold off and not get married because we don't know what the future holds? Or maybe we should just move in together and kind of like just weather the storm.

And then when the storm has passed, then we'll have a wedding ceremony. Okay? And Paul writes in this passage and he says, listen, because of the present situation, I suggest just remain single. Don't get married. But the one thing you're not to do is to move in like you are married. He says that if you can't hold out because your passion is too strong, okay, it's fine to get married.

You haven't sinned. That's okay. But either marry or remain as you are. But what you shouldn't do is move in kind of like a counterfeit marriage. She says here in verse 8. I don't know if you picked that up.

[16 : 44] To the unmarried and to the widows, I say to you, it's good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise the self-control, let them marry. It's better to be married than to burn with passion.

So Paul's saying, single is fine. Marriage is good. Both of these are good. The present situation, I suggest you wait. But don't give yourself over to sin. That's going to be the worst thing that you can do.

Okay, so God's design, order design for relationships to flourish is for joy-filled sexual intimacy to always follow the uniting, the one flesh union in marriage.

Okay? Now, there's a couple of reasons for this. As we said, God's design is that sex and intimacy are always joined together. That sexual intimacy, emotional intimacy is wedded to or married to the depth of commitment that we make.

And Chris spoke about this last week. And one of the reasons for that is sex is such a powerful and important aspect of married life. Sex is so much more than just body on body, skin on skin.

[17 : 46] It's really a soul on soul. There's a deep union of our spirits, our souls, in a very, very deep level. Scripture talks about the two becoming one.

And the physical union of sexual intimacy is a picture of what happens on a very deep soul level as well. And so when you say your vows and you say, with all that I am and all that I have, I give myself to you for my whole life.

Sexual intimacy is meant to be the physical but also the spiritual consummation of those vows, of the two becoming one flesh. Here, listen to how John Piper says it. He explains it really well.

He says this, sexual intimacy is a sacred physical, mental, emotional, as well as spiritual consummation of the sacred vows made before God in a moment.

When God himself really does join two people together in a one flesh union. What Piper is saying there is that marriage is not just a physical one flesh union.

[18:48] Sexual intimacy is the physical expression of something that happens in a deep mental, emotional, spiritual, soulful level. And so that's why God brings these two things together.

For sex and marriage to always be united together. This is God's design. Now, a couple of questions or objections.

Some people might say, okay, but I've looked in the Bible and nowhere in the Bible does it say you need to have a wedding ceremony to be married, right? Or maybe you have heard people say, maybe you thought this, but we married in God's eyes, right?

We just said, hey, I love you, you love me. In God's eyes, we married together. But that's not actually quite right. That's not what the Bible says. Do you remember in John chapter 4, Jesus encounters this lady at a well and he says to her, hey, go and call your husband.

And she says, I don't have a husband. And Jesus says, you're right. You've had five husbands, but the man you're living with now is not your husband. That's right. What's Jesus saying? Both Jesus and the lady are affirming that as sincere as they may be, living together is not the same as marriage.

[19:59] And actually we see this in Hebrews chapter 13. Hebrews 13 says this. I think we've got it on the slide. Marriage should be honored by all. And the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and the sexually immoral.

Now the word there, marriage, is the word *gamos* in Greek. And it doesn't refer to the institution of marriage. It actually means a wedding feast or wedding ceremony. And what the rite of Hebrews is saying here is when you gather with your family and your friends in public and made your vow, that wedding feast, you've got to honor those vows.

And so actually in the Bible, marriage is not just two people saying, hey, I love you, you love me, let's do this thing. It's a public, permanent, exclusive, legal commitment that you make before friends and family saying, I'm in this for life.

And you're in this for life. And we're asking you to hold us accountable. So Zee and Helen and I have been talking about their wedding in two weeks' time. And in the vows, Zee is going to say some vows to Helen.

Helen is going to say a vow to Zee. And then we're going to ask the congregation, do you as their friends and family hear these vows? Are you going to hold them accountable? Because marriage isn't just two people saying, hey, let's do life together.

[21:11] It's a public, permanent, exclusive, legal, lifelong commitment in front of your friends and family saying we committed for the rest of our lives. And you get to hold us accountable.

Here's another thing we often hear people say. I don't know if you've heard this or thought this yourself. Why do I need a piece of paper to prove that I love you?

Why do I need a piece of paper? Why do I need a sign on the dotted line? Can't I just say that I love you and just, why do I need a piece of paper to prove my commitment to you? But if you think about it, is there any other circumstance in life when that would fly, right?

Imagine someone comes and says, hey, I love you so much. With all that I am, all that I have, I give myself to you. And you say, hey, I so appreciate that. Can we say that in front of our friends and family?

You say, no, no, no, I'm not ready to go that far, right? What are they saying? They say, I love you, but I don't love you that much, right? Imagine someone comes to you and says, listen, I want you to come and work for me.

[22:13] I've got a big project coming up, and it's going to be demanding. You're going to work 12 hours a day. You're going to travel loads. You're not going to see much of your family. It's going to be demanding. I'm going to ask everything of you.

But at the end of this project, 12 months, you're going to get 20% equity in the deal. \$20 million is coming your way, okay? It's going to be a grueling 12 months, but \$20 million. And you say, oh, it sounds appealing.

I've been trying to save for a house, an apartment. Okay, I'm in. Where can I sign on the line? And they say, no, no, no, we don't do contracts just here. It's just a gentleman's agreement, right? How many of us are going to agree to that?

No, no, but when someone says, hey, I love you, but don't ask me to commit to it, what are they saying? They're saying, I love you, but I don't love you that much. Marriage, when someone says, actually, I'm willing to commit, when we sign on the line between friends and family, here I am, all that I am, I give myself to you.

That's actually what it requires to love one another. And so it's not the piece of paper that proves it. It's your willingness to stand before friends and family and make a public vow to be held accountable.

[23 : 19] That's what proves your love to one another. Friends, if you're a Christian this morning, part of what it means to live in relationship with God is that we take God at His word. We know that God is good, and we take Him at His word.

And a Christian is someone who, by the grace of God, is learning to love God and trust Him and obey Him. Someone's coming to see that self-autonomy is the way of death. And in the Bible, in Genesis 3, we see it.

We're going to look at it next week. In Matthew 4, we see it. And we see it in 21st century Hong Kong. The devil always comes to God's people and says, has God really said that? Are you sure is that what God said?

And He always comes and He says, God doesn't want you to be happy. If God really wanted you to be happy, He wouldn't make this rule. Friends, Jesus asks us to follow Him and trust Him, not because He's trying to minimize our joy, but because He wants to maximize it.

God wants us to flourish. He wants our relationships to flourish. He wants us to maximize our pleasure, not minimize it. He says, come and trust Me. Okay, so that's the first reason, biblically.

[24 : 23] Secondly, ethical reason. There's a professor of economics at the University of San Francisco called Bruce Wydick. And Bruce Wydick, he actually specializes in behavioral economics.

So he's written lots of papers on poverty and globalization. But he's also looked at marriage and the institution of families. And he wrote a fascinating article a few years ago on cohabitation.

And one of the things he points out is that cohabitation is a form or a way eases or promotes the abuse of women in society.

Okay, listen to what he says here. It says, It's unlike the institution of marriage, which intends to build a mutual commitment, even as the couple grow older together and face various challenges, ups and downs.

The relative flimsiness of cohabitation creates a context where many men are increasingly able to exert power over women. The commitment of a man to a woman with whom he has sexual relationships is not prudery.

[25 : 27] Okay, that means old-fashioned moralism. It's social justice. Sex, devoid of genuine commitment, is actually a form of stealing. Okay, the tragic irony is that the sexual liberation espoused by some couldn't play more perfectly into the short-term selfish interests of men.

Okay? You see what he's saying there? He's saying when a couple come together and a man says, Listen, why don't you move in with me? Come and live with me and give me your body and give me yourself and we'll pull resources together.

But actually, I'm not going to commit to you. What's he doing? He's taking from her without giving of himself in return. He says, The commitment of a man to a woman with whom he has sexual relations is not old-fashioned moralism.

It's social justice. It's a justice issue. Similarly, Megan Jay, she's not a Christian. She's a clinical psychologist at the University of Virginia. She wrote a piece for the New York Times called The Downside of Cohabiting Before Marriage.

And in this article, she tells the story of how a young lady came to her practice, a lady called Jennifer, because she had been married for six months and now she wanted out of the marriage.

[26 : 39] And she was depressed and she thought, I spent more time planning my wedding than actually being married. And she was depressed by this and so came to see this clinical psychologist. But listen to what Megan Jay writes.

She says, Jennifer had never really felt that her boyfriend was committed to her. So they'd lived together for many years and then decided to get married. She says, I felt like I was on a multi-year, never-ending audition to be his wife.

Now just think about that. I felt like I was on this never-ending, multi-year audition where I was good enough to be his wife. Now just as a sidebar, just think about this.

What do we call it in society when a woman works for a boss and always needs to give in sexual favors or give in to his flirting in order to keep her job? We call that sexual abuse, right?

I mean, that's what Harvey Weinstein was doing. See what this lady's saying? I felt like I was on this never-ending audition, always having to keep up in order to get him to commit to me.

[27 : 38] She goes on to say, We had all the furniture. We had the dogs and the same friends. It made it really, really difficult to break up. Then it was like we just got married because we were living together and we were into our 30s.

And so both these people are saying the same thing. That when a man asks a woman to share her bed, share her body, to give of herself to him, and he doesn't commit to her for better or for worse, richer or poorer, sickness and health, till death do us part, he's stealing from her.

He's taking from her. He's asking her, and it can be the other way around, but generally men do this more than women. He's asking her to give herself to him, and he's not giving himself in return. And generally, okay, we'll actually get into that later.

The tragic irony is the sexual liberation couldn't play more perfectly into the short-term self-interest of men. And so we've said this before, but I just want to say to the ladies in Watermark, the wonderful ladies in Watermark, if your boyfriend says, Hey, come move in with me or come sleep with me, he's not loving you.

He's using you. He's taking advantage of you without giving himself to you. That's not love, right?

That's abuse. The best thing you can do is say, Forget it. Tell him, give him my number.

[28 : 52] Or give me his number. Okay, so ethically. Third thing is this. Pragmatically. Okay, pragmatically. Now, we mentioned earlier, but one of the main reasons why people move in together prior to marriage is because they want to see how compatible we are, right?

Do we actually fit? The way you, you know, do you leave the bathroom clean? Do I leave the bathroom clean? Do you leave a mess? Do you leave the dishes? Or do you wash them? Et cetera, et cetera. But also financially and sexually, are we compatible?

Do we fit together? And it's seen as a safe and a prudent way of screening out a bad relationship and preserving a good one.

Okay, that makes sense. Let's move and see if this works. If it doesn't work, well, then we know that we're not fit together. The problem is, the problem is, however, all the research shows us that doesn't work.

Listen to Megan Jay again in her article, okay? She says this. Couples who cohabit before marriage, and especially before an engagement, tend to be less satisfied with their marriages, more likely to divorce, than couples who do not.

[29 : 57] These negative outcomes are called the cohabitation effect. This is actually a term given to this, the cohabitation effect. In 2003, there was this mega study done called the relationship between cohabitation and marital quality and stability.

Okay, so massive research done designed to research this exact theme. Listen to the researcher's conclusion. About half of cohabiting individuals view living together as a way to assess compatibility prior to marriage.

Given this common motivation for living together, cohabitation should eliminate poor matches and make subsequent marriages more stable. The evidence, however, suggests the opposite.

Among married individuals, premarital cohabitation is related to lower marital satisfaction, less time spent together in shared activities, higher levels of marital disagreement, less supportive behavior, less positive problem solving, more reports of marital problems.

Compared to couples who enter directly into marriage, couples who cohabit have a higher risk of divorce. Megan J says like this, a relationship built on top of maybe you will do is simply not as stable as a relationship built on top of I do.

[31 : 18] And there's two main reasons we see for this. Sorry, this is a little bit academic, but anyway. One is this, when couples who are assessing whether they should get married move in together, if you then have doubts about the relationship, you've sunk so much in, you've invested so much in, it's really hard to move out, right?

And so you're trying to see, hey, does this relationship work? But then, so you move in together, but after a little while, you've got the house together, you've got the furniture, you've got the dogs together, and if you've got kids together, that's just another level.

How do you then say, oh, actually, I don't think this is a good relationship? And that's exactly what that lady Jennifer said a little earlier, right? Let's see if I can find it here. She said, we had our dogs, we had our furniture, we had the same friends, it made it really, really difficult to break up.

And that's exactly what all the research is. Actually, couples tend to stay into bad relationship because they've thought, we've invested so much, let's just get married and we hope for the best. And so actually, it's more likely bad relationships are going to stay together. But the other main reason is this. Couples who cohabit together before they get married in order to establish whether the relationship is good, go into marriage on the very basis that a good marriage is based on compatibility rather than the biblical basis, which is unconditional commitment and love.

[32 : 43] And when you go into a relationship based on, let's see how compatible we are, well, it could start off pretty well, but sorry to break it to you if you're young, we all get old, right?

Life is ups and downs. Things go wrong. Life is difficult. Sometimes your husband's body didn't look as good as it did on his wedding day, right? And 20 years later, you think, oh, maybe we're not so compatible anymore.

Maybe I should find somebody who's more compatible. And all the research tells us that men are more likely to be dissatisfied with their wives as they age over life based on compatibility is going to say, hey, let me find someone younger and more compatible, which is why it's easier for men to take advantage of women than marriage does.

But in marriage, when you go and you say, for better or for worse, richer or poorer, good-looking or not so good-looking, sickness and health, I give myself to you in the bond of marriage.

Based on that thing, when life gets hard and there's ups and downs and you experience trauma and difficulty, and I know some of you experience trauma that I've never experienced in my life, but when you say we're in this together, you can navigate that together.

[34 : 02] Cohabitation is not just an alternative to marriage. It's a different kind of relationship altogether. It's a counterfeit marriage. It looks the same, but it has a different DNA and doesn't have the same ingredients.

And in the end, it's made of a cheap substitute rather than the real thing. And friends, cheap substitutes cannot bear the weight that marriage was designed to bear. Think about this.

You're building a bridge, right, or a 50-story building or a highway. Who wants to live in a 50-story building built with cheap substitutes? Right, someone comes and says, he has hardware and concrete, but he has a cheap substitute.

Who of us want to live in a building made of cheap substitutes? Friends, marriage built on the basis of, let's see if this thing will work. Compatibility is made of a cheap substitute, and it's going to fail.

Okay. Lastly, Christianly. Now, we're going to get into more of this in the weeks to come. But we've looked at what the Bible says about marriage and sex and relationships.

[35 : 08] We've looked at the ethics of it. We've looked at both secular and Christian research. It tells us it's a bad idea pragmatically, practically, how does, what does Jesus say to Christians?

Okay. And I want to close just with two thoughts of, for those of us that are followers of Jesus, how to think about this. Maybe you're grappling with this. You're dating. Maybe you're engaged. You're wondering. What does Jesus say to us?

I want to consider two things Jesus asks us. The first is this. Jesus asks our lives to bear witness to his unconditional covenant of love. If you're a Christian this morning, your life preaches a message. And it preaches a gospel message. And it either preaches a message that says, God is faithful and trustworthy and good, or preaches a message that says, every man for himself. And our relationships are meant to preach a message.

And so when we move into, when we take on our culture's thinking around relationships and sexuality, the message that our lives preach to society is, every man in it for themselves.

[36 : 09] But God actually wants us to witness to his unmerited, unearned, covenantal love. His love that says, I've committed myself to you for better or for worse.

His love that says, even when you were my enemies, I went to the cross for you. Jesus' love for us isn't based on compatibility. Jesus doesn't love us selfishly. And therefore, those of us who have encountered his love, the way we love our partners, whether boyfriend or girlfriend or fiancé or

husband and wife, should demonstrate that same kind of unconditional, unmerited love. We give ourselves to one another in covenantal love. We've all heard before, but in Ephesians 5, Paul says, we as Christians should love our spouses the way that Christ loved us. This unearned, unmerited, unconditional love. Not one that's based on compatibility, but one that's based on commitment. And so our lives will either shine a spotlight onto the majesty and the glory of God and his love for us, or our lives will join the spotlights of society pointing inwards and saying, it's all about me.

And if you're a Christian, I want to call you, I want to invite you, let your life be a witness to the incredible, unconditional, marvelous love of Christ for us. We sang it this morning, how marvelous, how wonderful is my Savior's love for me.

[37 : 29] A love that went to the cross for us. A love that didn't just die us unto death, but that loved us through death into eternal life. Let our lives be witness to that.

Friends, if you're a Christian today, I want to ask you, what kind of gospel is your life preaching? What kind of message is it preaching? A few years ago, maybe 10 years ago or so, the previous church that Claire and I were a part of in Cape Town, there was a young couple there called Louis and Michelle.

And they were kind of checking out church. They'd been visiting for a little while. They were dating. And then they got engaged to be married. And they came to my colleague, Christa, and they said, Christa, we're getting married in four months' time.

We'd love for you to officiate our wedding. And Christa said, hey guys, it would be such an honor to officiate your wedding. But I want to talk about something. You guys are living together.

And I want to ask you to move out, to separate until your wedding, right? And Louis just looked at Christa and said, you've got to be kidding me, right?

[38 : 31] Really? And he said, it's going to cost us so much money. It's four months. I can't go rent an apartment. I don't know if I can do this. And Christa said to him, hey, this is what I'm asking you to do.

Don't trust me. Trust Jesus. The God who made you is also the God who knows you the best and he loves you the most. And Jesus is not holding out on you. Jesus wants your marriage to flourish. I want to ask you to trust Jesus. And so move out together. We'll help you. We'll do what we can. He said, listen, go think about it for a week and let's come back next week and talk about it. So Christa tells me about his conversation.

And I said, Christa, there is no chance those guys are going to move out. They are these cool, artistic designers that live in the city center. These guys are young, secular, urban people.

There's no chance they're going to move out. You're crazy. Anyway, they come back the next week and Louis says, Christa, you drive a hard bargain. He says, man, but I tell you what, we're going to trust God and we're going to do it.

[39 : 33] And so Louis moves out. He moves in with the CG leader. He sleeps on the couch for four months leading up to his wedding. The guys in the church got around him. He said, hey, you can stay here for a bit.

You can stay here. God around him. And on their wedding day, they had this incredible celebration, the coming together afresh, this one flesh union.

But I'll tell you what also happened. Something else happened. It wasn't just the pragmatics of them moving out. For the first time in their life, Christianity became real to them.

Christianity was no longer just a set of doctrine. It became about a person. Because for the first time in their life, Christianity wasn't just this theology. It was the person of Jesus. And they weren't just asked to trust a doctrine.

They were asked to trust Jesus, the one who died on the cross for them, the one who went to the cross for them, the one who loved them so much. And for the first time, they were confronted, will I trust Jesus or will I trust myself?

[40 : 30] And as they were confronted with that question, will I take Jesus as word? They realized it was going to cost them massively. Financially, sure. Convenience, sure.

But also it was going to cost them face, right? They're not going to explain to all their friends. You know, I'm staying with my buddy's house and their friends say, what are you doing? It cost them a lot of face in front of their friends.

But even though it was going to cost them, they came to a place where they said, Jesus is trustworthy. We're going to trust him. And do you know what happened? For the first time in their life, I think they actually became Christians that day.

Before that, they'd been cultural Christians. Before that, they'd been very religious. But for the first time in their life, they came to see Jesus is beautiful. Jesus is trustworthy. Jesus loves me so much that he went to the cross for me.

And when Jesus is asking me to do this, he's not applying some old outdated law. Jesus wants my best. And they took Jesus at his word. And today they're absolutely flourishing.

[41 : 28] As that leads us to the second thing, the first thing is Jesus asks our lives to be a witness to him. But the second thing is this. Jesus asks us to trust him and his faithfulness. Friends, to take Jesus seriously is going to be costly.

It's absolutely going to be costly. But it's going to be nowhere near as costly as not taking him seriously. That's going to be a high price to pay. Remember what Meg Jay said earlier.

A relationship built on top of maybe you'll do is nowhere near as secure as built on top of I do. Jesus comes to us and he doesn't just say I do. He says I did.

He went to the cross. He demonstrated his faithfulness. Jesus showed us by being nailed to the cross that his love for us is not just compatible. It's not just convenient.

Jesus loves us not just until death, but as we said earlier, through death into eternal life. Friends, we sang earlier how marvelous, how wonderful is our Savior's love for us.

[42 : 25] When Jesus calls us not to sleep with our partners, our boyfriends, our girlfriends before marriage, Jesus is not being old-fashioned or out of touch. The one who made you is the one who knows you the best.

And he's the one who loves you the most. And he's the one who wants the best for you. And Jesus wants your joy and your pleasure to maximize, not minimize. And so friends, you put your life in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus.

You can trust him. Put your future and your satisfaction and your joy in his hands. There's no one as secure and stable and steadfast as Jesus. There's no one as satisfying as Jesus.

There's no one who will look after your life like King Jesus. Come to him. He left heaven for you. He came to earth for you. He went to the cross for you. He died and rose again for you.

Come to Jesus. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, as we look at this very, very practical, but also very deeply emotional subject, God, of sexual intimacy and living with a partner, God, we ask you to come and give us grace.

[43 : 37] God, we admit that our fears are real. Insecurities are real. Some of us, as we said earlier, have come from broken homes. We've experienced the pain and the trauma of broken families.

God, won't you help us to trust you? Won't you help us to trust you? God, as we've said so many times before, you ask us, God, not to run a 10-mile race, but to take the first step towards trusting you.

Father God, thank you that you move towards us before you ask us to move towards you. You're not in heaven holding out on us, waiting for us to sort out our lives. You move towards us in all our pain, in all our fear, in all our suffering and our sin, and you say, I love you enough.

I'm calling you to myself. Jesus, thank you for moving towards us. God, we ask you that you pour your grace on us. We ask you, God, where it's hard to trust you, where it just feels right.

God, help us to trust you, we pray. God, I pray for those of us that are in relationships. Help us, God.

[44 : 52] Help us to honor you and to honor one another. We pray this, Christ, in your awesome name. Amen.

Amen.