

# **“Dating in Community”**

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**1. Introduction**

**2. Why is it difficult to discuss dating within community groups?**

**3. What would be the ideal way to discuss dating in community groups?**

**4. How far can I go? What does the Bible say about dating? Premarital sex?**

**5. Cohabitation, shacking up, staying the night**

**6. Marriage, divorce, and remarriage issues**

**7. Importance of community in dating relationships**

**8. Miscellaneous**

**a. Documents & Resources**

**b. Get help if needed**

**c. Watermark Premarital Class**

**i. What is it?**

**ii. When is it offered?**

**iii. What's the format?**

**iv. Who should take the class?**

**Case Study 1:** *Your friend has been struggling with pornography. He claims that it is not affecting his relationship, but he knows that he is called to quit this habit because it is not glorifying to Christ. He is willing to discuss this issue with you and a group of guys from church, but he does not want to discuss it with his girlfriend. He thinks it will only hurt her and she can't understand his struggle. What do you suggest, and how will you discuss this within your group?*

He's right – she probably won't understand his struggle. Most men are visual and most women do not understand this battle men face when it comes to lust.

I think it is awesome that he has a group of guy friends with whom he feels comfortable being transparent and accountable. I hope that ongoing accountability will be an area of growth for this group so that they can sharpen each other and ultimately help one another, with God's grace, to avoid sin such as this in the future. He is responding rightly by dealing with the sin (Ephesians 5.3, 1 Corinthians 6.18, 1 Thessalonians 4.3-8, Matthew 5.27-30, among others on lust and sexual immorality).

I know he doesn't want to hurt his girlfriend, but he needs to recognize that he has sinned against God... Within marriage, this would clearly be a sin against her by committing adultery as Jesus described it (Matthew 5:27). Even on the premarried side, he is establishing patterns that can threaten the bonds of his potential future marital relationship. I assume that masturbation has been a key component of the pornography problem. Is this honoring to her, or to any women for that matter?

There is no verse in the Bible that speaks specifically to the confession of sexual sin to one's spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend. However, James does encourage us to "*confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed...*" (James 5.16).

It would be very unfair for her to come into marriage and not be aware that this is, and has been, a struggle for him. While she does not need to know all the details, she deserves to know that this is a struggle for him – she won't be deceived down the road, and she is getting a more complete picture of who she is dating. The way he responds to this sin should be very telling to her on how we will respond to sin in the future. In addition, he can gauge how she will respond to his confessions of sin. While she should not condone the sin, hopefully she can respond with grace and prayer.

He ought to confess to her, confess to his community, and ask for forgiveness first from God (Psalm 51.4), and second from his girlfriend. Assure her it's not about her... Live out 1 Peter 3.7 –that he has not been 'living' with her in an understanding way.

I'd recommend reading *For Men Only* and *For Women Only*. These books help men understand why looking at pornography is so damaging to the women they are in relationships with, and help women understand the battle many men face with lust/their eyes.

**Case Study 2:** *Tom & Katie and have been sexually active on and off during their dating and engagement and are currently sexually active. Even though they know it is wrong, they continue to sleep together. What counsel do you provide to them, and what scripture can you use to back up your counsel? How would you address this in your community group?*

I would take the opportunity to make sure they know why this is not God's best for their relationship. I would lovingly take them to scripture – Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:3, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Hebrews 13:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:5-6, Romans 12:1-2. Sex is intended for a husband and wife within marriage, not before.

I would talk to them about boundaries, accountability, how to make wise decisions about not being alone in compromising positions, on their need for accountability and guidelines on how to wisely date. Maybe for a season they need to make the rule that they will not be alone together except in a public place, etc....

I would want them to know that they cannot properly evaluate this relationship if they are sexually active. They are reaping benefits that are not intended for dating couples. And when you are having sex with someone else on the premarried side, it is easy to overlook the problems. I call this the love goggles that dating couples often wear – those love goggles prevent you from seeing things clearly.

This is a great opportunity for the male to step up and lead in the relationship. Ephesians 5:25 calls the husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church. Any man that leads his girlfriend or wife in sexual sin is not loving his wife as Christ loved the church. For both the male and female – if they can't hold to boundaries now, what makes them think they can hold boundaries down the road as husband and wife when it comes to other people, other sexual sin, etc...

In addition, this is an opportunity for the male to evaluate what kind of woman he is in a relationship with. Is she really a 'completing spouse' (Genesis 2:18-25)? A completing spouse is one who encourages her husband/boyfriend towards becoming more like Christ. If she cannot push him to become more like Christ now, than it is safe to assumption that she will face this challenge further down the road as husband and wife as well.

In addition, no pastor at Watermark will officiate the wedding ceremony of a couple who is sexually active. While any of us would understand the temptations that come in a dating relationship, and hope that there is attraction between them, none of us would be able to stand before God and vouch for a couple that is engrossed in sexual sin on a continual basis.

## **YOUNG ADULT LEADER RESOURCE LIST**

*Before You Get Engaged* – David Gudgel and Brent Gudgel 2008

*Dating with Pure Passion: More than Rules, More than Courtship, More than a Formula* – Rob Eager 2005

*For Men Only* – Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn 2006

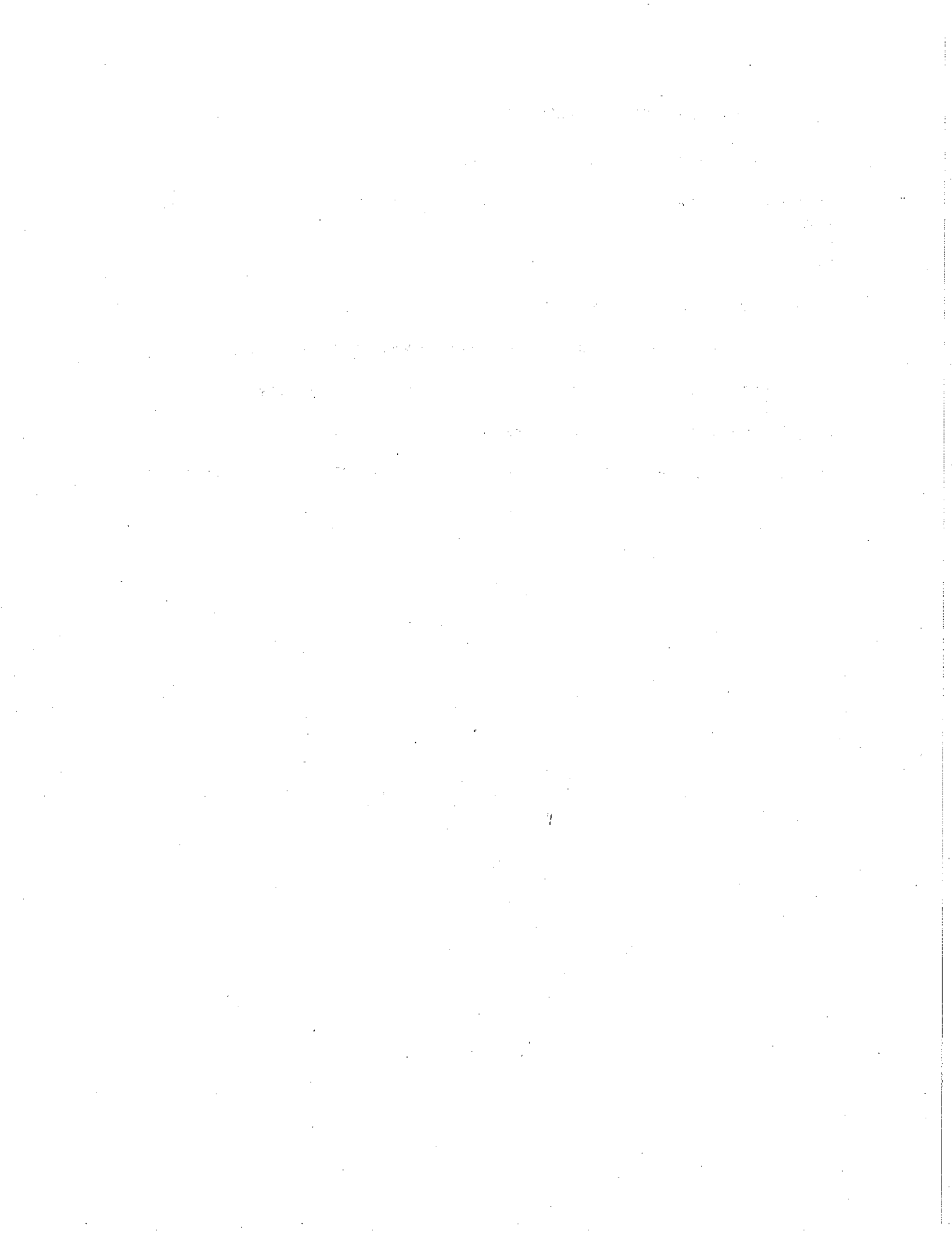
*For Women Only* – Shaunti Feldhahn 2004

*Girls' Guide to Marrying Well* – Boundless Webzine <http://www.boundless.org/girls/>

*Guys' Guide to Marrying Well* – Boundless Webzine <http://www.boundless.org/guys/>

*Living Together: Myths, Risks & Answers* – Mike & Harriett McManus 2008

*Sex Before Marriage: How Far is Too Far?* (booklet) – Timothy Lane 2009 <http://www.wtsbooks.com/>



# The Premarital Sexual Covenant

Engagement is a special time in your life. Why not consider a step to maximize the conditions for a chance to have a lifelong committed relationship? Why not take a step to make this time extra special by postponing sexual intimacy in order to concentrate your full energy and attention to strengthening the relationship itself? Sex has an unhealthy way of stunting growth when it is not part of marriage. It becomes a substitute for conversation and bonds a couple to inappropriate self-gratification.

What is outlined below is a voluntary pledge by a seriously dating or engaged couple to chastity or sexual integrity. It is optional but strongly encouraged. Secular research provides evidence that couples who live by Scriptural standards are far more likely to have a lifelong marriage. Chastity is God's best for each couple. Therefore, your Mentor Couple will ask you to consider agreeing to limit your physical involvement, as indicated below, and to be accountable to your Mentors. The aim is to build the relationship on the rock of Christ, giving the marriage a foundation that can last for life. Those considering or preparing for marriage are asked by their Mentors to talk about the covenant 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 the marriage Mentors and you. Ultimately, it is a spiritual matter between you and God.

1. Be honest about the physical part of your relationship. Consider making a commitment to keeping your physical level at #1 - # 6.

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1) Lightly holding hands    | 6) French kiss                             |
| 2) Constantly holding hands | 7) Fondling breasts                        |
| 3) Hugs                     | 8) Together nude                           |
| 4) Light kiss               | 9) Fondling sexual organs                  |
| 5) Strong kiss              | 10) Oral Sex, Anal Sex, Sexual Intercourse |

2. If the physical level exceeds #6, you must both be willing to inform your Mentor Couple. The man must contact the male Mentor within 24 hours after exceeding the physical limit. If the man does not do so, the woman will call the female Mentor. Letting your Mentor know keeps you accountable, so your focus can be on the spiritual, character building issues which are important in forging a lifelong committed marriage.

Our expectation for members preparing for marriage at Watermark is that they are not living together. If you need an explanation please give us a call.

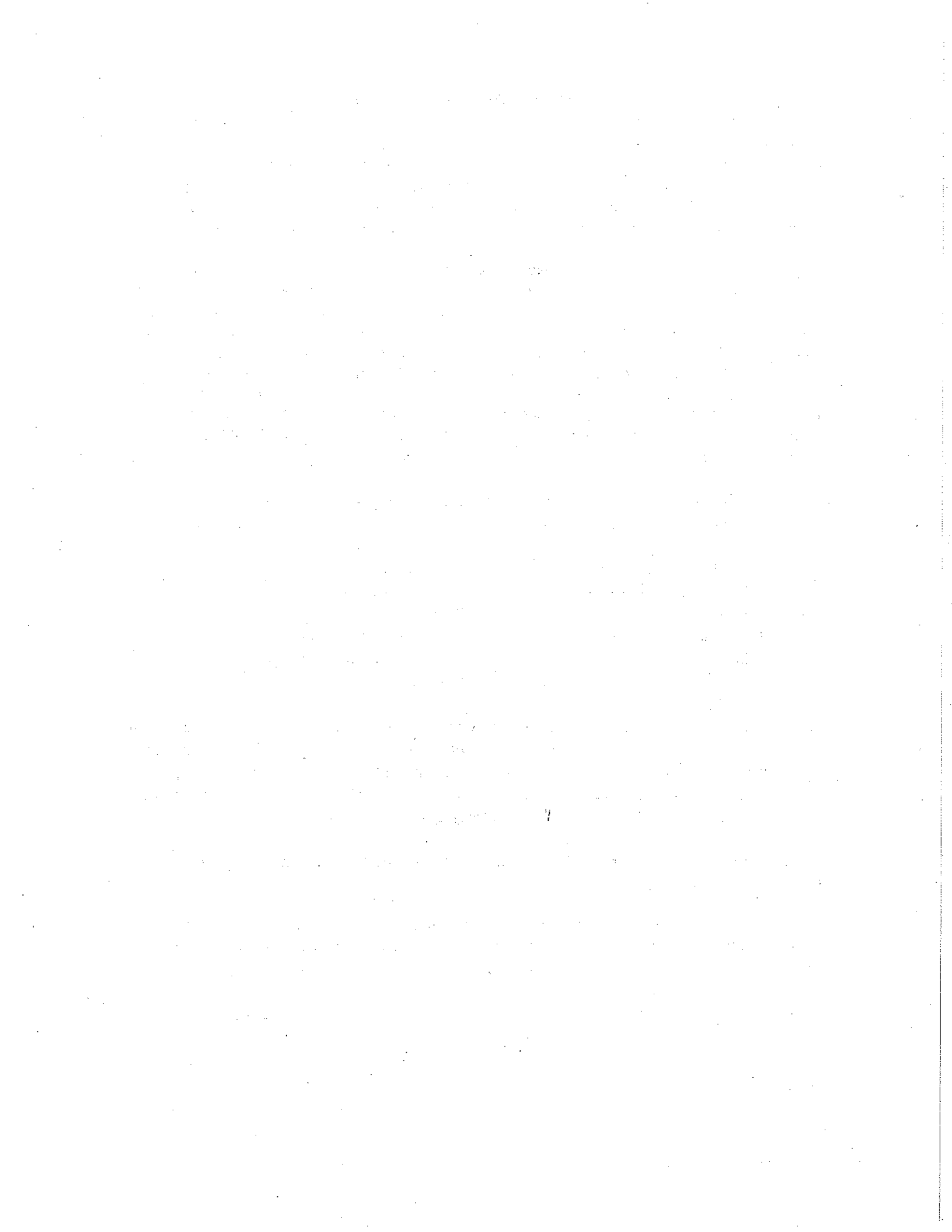
*We pledge to hold our relationship to a Biblical standard, so the Lord might bless this relationship now, and in the many years ahead. Therefore, we agree to call our Mentors if the physical involvement goes beyond level #6.*

Couple

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Mentors

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## A STATEMENT ON DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE IN THE LIFE OF WATERMARK COMMUNITY CHURCH

### MARRIAGE

1. Marriage is not a human institution, but a divine one, initiated by God at creation and deemed good by Him along with all of God's creation (Genesis 2:18-24)
2. God's perfect plan for marriage is that it be a life-long pursuit of intimacy between a man and a woman and that it never be ended by anything but death (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6). He desires that two people would not merely live together, but that they would pursue oneness within their marriage relationship. Being "undivorced" and yet ignoring this call to oneness, mutual submission, and love is also a violation of His intention for marriage.
3. Marriage is an illustration of the covenant relationship between God and believers. Where Christ is the head of His bride the church, husbands are to follow His example in his sacrificial love for His bride. Where the church is to lovingly submit to the authority of Christ as the head, wives are to lovingly submit to the authority of their husband which has been established by God (Ephesians 5:22-33).

### DIVORCE

1. It is true that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:15-16). It is NOT true that God hates the divorced person. He hates divorce, not only because it distorts the picture of His unending love for His bride (mentioned above), but He also hates divorce because it is devastating to children, society, and the individuals themselves.
2. **BIBLICAL TOLERANCE OF DIVORCE** -- Because of the sinful nature of this world and the hardness of the human heart (Matthew 19:8), God tolerates divorce in three cases. ***This allowance is NEVER to be confused with His preference.*** These are not commandments and divorce should always be viewed as the last step in lovingly disciplining a rebellious and unrepentant spouse. It should be noted that the biblical toleration of divorce does NOT answer the question of God's position on remarriage after divorce takes place. God tolerates divorce in the cases of:
  - a. **ADULTERY** – Where there has been sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9).
  - b. **ABANDONMENT** – Where a believing spouse has been deserted by an unbelieving spouse. Note that this must be the choice of the unbeliever and not by the initiative of the believer (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).
  - c. **ABUSE** – Where there is danger to the spouse or children due to physical or sexual abuse, separation may be advisable. Should the offending party remain unrepentant in this sin (see #4 and 5 below), divorce *may be* the end result of this separation.
3. Therefore, divorce is always the result of sin, but is not always itself a sin (Matthew 19:7-8).
4. Openness to reconciliation is always preferred to divorce (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). In the case of adultery, abandonment, or abuse, the unrepentant spouse should be pursued by the offended spouse and the community of faith in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and Ephesians 4:32.
5. In the case of an unrepentant spouse, Matthew 18:17 instructs us to treat them as an unbeliever, in which case the instructions in 1 Peter 3:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 would apply.
6. In cases of a marital relationship that is destructive to either the spouse or the children by means of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, there is room for separation that does not require divorce. Again, the offending individual should be handled according to the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17 and reconciliation should be pursued.

## REMARRIAGE

1. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been called to a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:16-20), calling all people to be reconciled to God. Though consistently unfaithful to our Creator, our Bride Groom, He has faithfully pursued all people that they might be reconciled to Him. As those who have been reconciled, believers have been given this message and this ministry to call unfaithful lovers back to a reconciliation with God. A believer who is divorced has this ministry in a unique way with their former spouse and should view the issue of remarriage in light of this higher calling.
2. Remarriage is permitted when the former spouse is deceased (Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 7:39).
3. The remarriage of one's divorced spouse may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse may be free to remarry a believer (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)
4. Where the former spouse has not remarried, absolute dogma is more difficult to establish in the Scriptures.

NOTE: Remarriage after a divorced spouse marries again (see #3) at least has in its favor that reconciliation was decisively cut off before. However, while the spouse is still unmarried and alive reconciliation is still Biblically possible, and preferable. This makes it very difficult and raises great concern that counsel would be given that would condone a step that decisively ends what God meant to be permanent and which could yet be potentially restored (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Others believe that 1 Corinthians 7:15 ("Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace.") gives freedom to a Christian to remarry if abandoned by an unbeliever. Since it cannot be absolutely established that this position is incorrect, we extend grace to those who hold this position even as those who hold to it should see the basis for and extend grace to those who hold to the other position. It should be noted that in either case all agree that every effort should be made at reconciliation and much time and counsel in community given before any new relationship should be considered.

5. Where divorce has occurred prior to conversion, the new believer should own their part in the dissolution of the marriage and seek forgiveness and reconciliation in accordance with the warnings and admonitions given in Scripture (1 Corinthians 7:11; James 5:16, 2 Corinthians 6:14).

For more insight into these topics, please see "*Why Marriage is a Big Deal to God*", specifically part 4 ([http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/media/media.asp?q\\_cmd=20&q\\_ID=20031130](http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/media/media.asp?q_cmd=20&q_ID=20031130)) and "*Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage: The Ordeal and the Ideal*" ([http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/media/media.asp?q\\_cmd=20&q\\_ID=20011202](http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/media/media.asp?q_cmd=20&q_ID=20011202)).

# Watermark Community Church Cohabitation Statement

## **Biblical Marriage Relationship**

The biblical picture of marriage is a formal commitment and covenant resulting in two people 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 6:12). 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 6:13,18; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

## **Cohabitation in our Society**

Webster's Dictionary defines a cohabitating couple as one that lives together and is sexually active.<sup>1</sup> Both the percentage of couples living together and moral acceptance of cohabitation are increasing among evangelical Christians.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup>. Couples that cohabitated before marriage were found to have less positive interactions (higher levels of unresolved conflict)<sup>5</sup>, which is a reliable predictor of the relationship's future success or failure.<sup>6</sup> Domestic violence increases five times the amount of married

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster inc., *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> The Barna Group, *The Buster Report: A New Generation of Adults Bends Moral and Sexual Rules to Their Liking*, Oct. 31, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Bramlett MD and Mosher WD. Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States. National Center for Health Statistics. *Vital Health Stat.* 23(22). 2002. 26.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, 56.

<sup>5</sup> Kline, Stanley, Markman, Olmos-Gallo, St. Peters, Whitton and Prado, Timing is Everything: Pre-Engagement Cohabitation and Increased Risk for Poor Marital Outcomes. *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 18. (2), 2004. 311-318.

<sup>6</sup> John Mordechai Gottman and Nan Silver, *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: What You Can Learn from the Breakthrough Research to Make Your Marriage Last* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), .28.

couples<sup>7</sup>, while abuse, depression, financial hardship, and infidelity of partners greatly increase among cohabitating couples.<sup>8</sup> 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. The findings of secular research notwithstanding, it is Watermark's conviction that cohabitation is a biblically sinful decision for individuals and couples. If a couple decides to continue cohabitating, Watermark will 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).

It is our observation that couples that honor the Lord in every aspect of their relationship, experience greater oneness, peace, and joy in marriage. If you are currently cohabitating or have questions about cohabitation, the following steps are available at Watermark:

- 1) Participation in pre-marital class
- 2) Completion of the Prepare Inventory
- 3) Sessions with a mentor couple for pre-marital counseling

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<sup>7</sup> Pamela J. Smock and Wendy D. Manning, "Living Together Unmarried in the United States: Demographic Perspectives and Implications for Family Policy," *Law & Policy* 26, no. 1 (January 2004)

<sup>8</sup> McManus, Michael and Harriet. *Living Together: Myths, Risks & Answers*. Howard Books, New York, NY, 2008, 41-57.

# How Much Do I Need to Know About My Potential Spouse's Sexual Past? My Response (Russell D. Moore)

— Wednesday, March 10th, 2010 —

QUESTIONS AND ETHICS



Below is a “Questions and Ethics” letter I posted a while back. Here are some of your responses to this query. Below is my response to the writer.

*Dear Dr. Moore,*

*I am a young single Christian woman. I made a commitment at a very young age to remain sexually chaste, and I've done so. I have dated other boys, but always just in groups in a very casual setting. Now, however, I am seeing a young Christian man who seems great in every way. We have dated for about a month, and I really like him. He treats my family (my father is deceased but my mother and sisters live near me) great, and all my friends like him.*

*Here's my question. I am wondering what his sexual past looks like, in order to know what I'm getting into. Has he been with other women, sexually? If so, how many and in what way? Has he ever had a problem with pornography? With every week that goes by, I'm more and more in love with him, and I'm afraid to keep getting my hopes up only to have them dashed when we're right at the point of marriage.*

*I'm not saying that any particular information would necessarily kill the relationship, but I'd sure like to know something about this to know what I'm getting myself into. It sure seems awkward, though, to say, “So tell me about your sex life?” Would that be forcing too much intimacy too soon? Is it right for a woman to be so forward with a man who's not her husband? Do I ever need to know this?*

*My question: should I ask him about his past? If so, how should I ask it, and at what point in the relationship?*

*True Love Waiting*

Dear True,

First of all, I agree with you that this is something important for you to know, should this man become your husband. His body and his sexuality, the Bible says, will belong to you (1 Cor. 7:4). Moreover, the sexual union is not, whatever our broken culture might try to think, simply a neurological or even emotional response. The sexual union, mysteriously, forms a personal union (1 Cor. 6:16). Your husband's past will, in a very real sense, become part of your story, too.

Having said that, though, this question can be very dangerous for you, at this point. As you seem to recognize, dating is about discerning whether someone would be a good prospect for marriage. I've seen several budding relationships wrecked by a "DTR" ("define the relationship" talk) about such matters that formed, prematurely, an inappropriate emotional intimacy.

I do not think, at this time, you need to delve into the details (or lack thereof) of his past. What's important for you to know is how he views sexual immorality. A man who will brush off past fornication as "no big deal" from which he's "moved on" is a man with a conscience trained to do the same thing with future adultery.

I would recommend asking this man what his convictions are about protecting himself, and his future marriage, from sexual immorality. You might ask him how he would counsel his son to flee pornography or other forms of immorality. I think you'll be able to gauge a lot from the wisdom and gravity (or lack thereof) he displays.

As the discernment process continues, though, your need to know further will expand. By that time, you will know more about the character and trajectory of this man.

There's a really critical peril here though.

On the one hand, a man who glibly dismisses his past immorality is dangerous, for your future marriage and your future children.

On the other hand, your dismissing him automatically on the basis of immorality is also dangerous. If he is repentant, seeing his past sin as hell-deserving but crucified, then you should receive him (all else being equal), just as you have been received.

You are not "owed" a virgin because you are. Your sexual purity wasn't part of a quid-pro-quo in which God would guarantee you a sexually unbroken man. Your sexual purity is your obligation as a creature of God. And you have rebelled at other points and been forgiven. If you believe the gospel, you believe the gospel for everyone, and not just for yourself.

If your future husband is repentant, and forgiven, and yet you are "tortured" by the thoughts of his past, then the issue for you is one of personal pride and a refusal to see oneself as a gospel-forgiven sinner.

The issue for you with your future husband is discerning whether there are ongoing patterns, whether he agrees with God about the severity of this sin, and whether he has been cleansed from it by Golgotha Hill blood and Garden Tomb power.

Jesus was a virgin. His Bride wasn't. He loved us anyway.