Bob: Living together before you’re married just isn’t a good idea, especially if you’re a woman. Here’s Glenn Stanton.

Glenn: Marriage is the relationship on the woman’s terms. A wife is a more powerful player in the relationship than a live-in girlfriend is. In cohabitation, the guy is the one that has most of the relational influence and power. In marriage, it’s the woman. Young ladies need to understand that. There is something about marriage that empowers the women.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Wednesday, June 17th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. We came this close to playing that Beyoncé song, Put a Ring on It, as a teaser for this radio program; but we used this generic blues riff instead. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on the Wednesday edition. My first full-time job, working in radio—I worked in an all-news station—news and talk. I remember—I think it was Valentine’s Day. Our sister station carried a feature by a CBS newsman, Charles Osgood.

Dennis: Yes.

Bob: If you ever listened to The Osgood Report—he was a great writer / great delivery. I mean, I loved listening to him as I drove in.

Dennis: Yes.

Bob: I think it was Valentine’s Day, years ago, when I heard him recite a love poem. It was one he had written. He prefaced his love poem by talking about the fact that the census department had just come up with this new designation of people in the census and had called them “persons of the opposite sex sharing living quarters,”—that was the designation. You were either “married,” or you were “divorced,” or you were “persons of the opposite sex sharing living quarters.” He made that into an acronym: “POSSLQ”. He wrote a love poem to his POSSLQ. I’d like to read it to you—may I do that?

Dennis: You may.
Bob: [Recites the poem, *POSSLQ*, by Charles Osgood. CBS Radio (1982)]

Dennis: Sounds like a rodent! [Laughter]

Bob: [Continues reading *POSSLQ*]

Dennis: Isn’t that sweet?

Bob: That’s sweet. Yes! That’s always stuck with me. We’re talking about POSSLQs today; aren’t we?


Glenn: I do love radio!

Dennis: I mean, you can read a poem like that. I don’t know about that poem!

Glenn is a friend who works at an organization we have the utmost respect for—*Focus on the Family*. He and his wife Jackie were married in 1982. They have five children. He’s the author of a number of books, including this book. He does a lot of research for *Focus on the Family*. In fact, you are the Director of Family Formation Studies—do a lot of debating.

Glenn: A lot of debating. I do a lot of reading / a lot of research. Then I get to go out and apply that research in making arguments for the things that we believe. I love to be able to engage people who don’t necessarily believe what we believe and try to convince them that we have something going for us—we have research, we have data, we have facts on our side.

Bob: We also have, hopefully, grace and stability in that kind of an environment.

Glenn: Absolutely. And that’s the big part of it as well. It’s interesting—I’ll come back from debates and they’ll be like, “Who won?” It’s not about “Who won?” It’s about “What did you get to say and what assumptions did you get to challenge?”

Bob: Yes.

Glenn: Those sorts of things. It’s not about winning arguments—it’s about winning hearts / it’s about winning minds.

Dennis: It really is! You can win the debate and you can lose it very easily—
Glenn: Absolutely!

Dennis: —by coming across as a finger-pointing—against everything and anything—

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: —and just being negative.

You’ve written this book because of— not a new phenomenon / it’s not new—but it’s a growing phenomenon.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: Cohabitation.

Glenn: Phenomenally growing! Absolutely!

Dennis: In 1960, a little over 400,000 people were cohabiting in America. Today, it’s grown 17 times—

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: There are over 7.5 million cohabiting today.

Glenn: Couples! That’s not just the individuals—couples! I mean, that’s remarkable! If you look at the projection line from the ’60s, it is just straight up. If we’re going to look at the family-formation trends that are really, really moving in a positive direction / upward direction—I shouldn’t say positive, necessarily—it is cohabitation and out-of-wedlock child-bearing—it’s not marriage. Divorce is kind of leveling off. Cohabitation is the one that is really just spiking, and we need to pay attention to that.

Dennis: Are cohabiting couples growing faster—at a greater percentage—

Glenn: Oh, absolutely!

Dennis: —than any other form?

Glenn: Than, really, anything else. And, more children are born into cohabiting situations than to truly single moms—in terms of—we think about out-of-wedlock child-bearing—single women without a guy around. Well, most of these are cohabiting situations. So, in terms of just the absolute, off-the-chart growth trends, it’s those two things; and they’re really related.

Bob: You had somebody suggest to you the other day that this is the new norm—that cohabitation is the new path to marriage—it’s almost the default.
**Glenn:** The *majority* of marriages happening today are preceded by some form of cohabitation—just a little over 60 percent. I mean, that’s *remarkable!*

**Dennis:** That was what was shared with me.

**Glenn:** Yes.

**Dennis:** I just kind of took a step back and I said, “What?!”

**Glenn:** Absolutely!

**Dennis:** Here’s what they said—they said: “Cohabitation is now viewed as the model for marriage preparation. Before you get married, you have a test drive.”

**Bob:** “Try before you buy!”

**Glenn:** Yes, and you know what? Here are the two things: First of all, cohabitation in the ’60s and ’70s came out of a *negative* attitude toward marriage—it was: “Oh, it’s just a piece of paper. We don’t need some judge to qualify our love. Our love will speak for itself.”

But now, cohabitation is, if you will, motivated by a high view of marriage, curiously. It is: “We do not want to mess up marriage like our parents did. We want to get it right; so rather than jump in and mess it up, we are going to kind of wade into it.” Cohabiting is the way that they wade into it. The great majority of young people today *think* that cohabitation *is* the smart way to wade into marriage, but the research tells a very different story.

**Dennis:** In fact, it doesn’t guarantee a divorce; but it increases the rate of divorce. Does it not?

**Glenn:** You know what? Researchers will tell you that if divorce is your interest, you could not do worse than to cohabit together. Cohabitation is not the *only* thing that drives divorce—but nothing will, in a curious way, guarantee divorce like cohabitation does.

**Bob:** Peel that back for me: “Why is it that, if my girlfriend and I get together and live together for a couple of years before we decide to go ahead and get married, why would that create any issue for our marriage?”

**Glenn:** Yes.

**Bob:** “I mean, it would seem like we kind of eased into it—we had a test period.”
Glenn: Yes.

Bob: “We decided: ‘Yes. We really do love each other and want to be together.’”

Glenn: Yes.

Bob: Why is it a destructive force?

Dennis: I want you to answer that question—but, just so our listeners understand, Bob—

Bob: It’s not my girlfriend!

Dennis: Thank you, Bob. [Laughter]

Bob: I was speaking hypothetically! [Laughter]

Glenn: That was big of you—just to be so forthright!

Dennis: It was a theoretical question that Bob has a girlfriend.

Bob: Yes, thank you. [Laughter]

Dennis: Okay! Now, go ahead and answer the question, Glenn.

Glenn: Dennis’s face just dropped!

Dennis: Yes; yes—right here on the radio—Bob announcing it!

Glenn: Don’t we have a statement of faith here that employees are supposed to sign?

Dennis: We do; we do.

Bob: Excuse me, Mary Ann’s on the phone. I need to take this real quick.

Dennis: We have a statement of faithfulness, too; and I can attest to Bob’s faithfulness. Anyway, answer the question, Glenn.

Glenn: That’s good!

Well, first of all, it’s important to understand, just with secular sociologists—if we went next week to, you know, the big meetings that they had—and we asked them to comment on this phrase, “the cohabitational effect,”—that it’s a term that they have developed to describe the fact that cohabiters, across the board, tend to have weaker,
less healthy, more brittle relationships. Those relationships go on to tend to be associated with greater divorce within marriage.

That fact is not contested among sociologists. It’s just a fact. They have a phrase for it: “the cohabitation effect.” The question is / the question that you’re asking: “Why?—why is that relationship there?” It’s interesting that that’s where the real debate comes up. Some sociologists say that cohabitation shows greater negative effect because it selects into itself people who, by themselves, don’t have as healthy a relationship.

**Bob:** They’re trying out marriage because they’re scared / they’re insecure. They didn’t see it modeled well. So, you’re starting with a sample group that’s already predisposed in a wrong direction.

**Glenn:** And because these are people who are kind of a little more adventurous, if you will, sexually and relationally—they don’t tend to adhere to, kind of, traditional views. There’s a bit of that—but the researchers are coming up with that there’s something about the cohabiting relationship itself. You ask the question: “What is it about—if me and my girlfriend get together and live together—what difference does that make?”

Here’s the big thing—two things: lack of commitment. Clearly, cohabitation is a holding back. It’s, “I’m not going to give completely everything to you.” The sociologists are finding, when you hold something back in a relationship, it makes a difference! The other is what they call (it’s kind of a fancy word) the “relational ambiguity.” That is—researchers, when they look at men and women cohabiting, men will tend to have an expectation of what the relationship is and women tend to have an expectation of what the relationship is. Curiously, one of those partners is more likely to say, “We’re just hanging out, and having fun, and seeing what happens.” There’s another partner who says: “You know what? We’re in love, and we’re kind of moving our way to marriage.”

Now, ask the question: “Who do you think the guy is? Who do you think the gal is?” You don’t have to be so gender stereotypical to realize girls more likely think about love / they think about marriage. The guys are more likely to just be hanging out and having fun. That means that the relationship itself is on different settings with each of those different people. That is a serious, if you will, flat tire to the relationship that keeps the relationship from moving in a healthy way.

**Dennis:** Instead of watching Bill O’Reilly the other night, I channel-surfed by some of the new television programs. I have to tell you—I was astounded.

**Glenn:** Yes.

**Dennis:** It’s like it’s a wholesale sales job on the next generation what we are talking about here: “This is healthy.”

**Glenn:** Yes.
**Dennis:** “This is good.”

**Glenn:** Yes.

**Dennis:** “This is normative.” And yet, it’s a lie.

**Glenn:** It’s interesting. Women are empowered. This is one thing that I like to say, and it’s absolutely true. Cohabitation is the relationship on the guy’s terms. Marriage is the relationship on the woman’s terms. A *wife* is a more powerful player in the relationship than a live-in girlfriend is. In cohabitation, the *guy* is the one that has most of the relational influence and power—in *marriage*, it’s the woman. Young ladies need to understand that. There is something about marriage that empowers the women.

**Bob:** So, the young woman, who is thinking to herself: “But if I don’t move in—he wants me to / he asked me to. I mean, he hasn’t indicated any kind of commitment—he said, ‘What do you think about us living together?’”

**Glenn:** Yes.

**Bob:** “If I say, ‘No,’ to that, he’s on to the next girl; and I’m alone and starting over again. I don’t want to start over again.”

**Glenn:** But see the irony of that is—back in the day, we would say: “You know what? If he’s not ready, he’s not the guy.” It’s interesting that the research is showing us—at the University of Denver, these scholars have found out—that for couples who move in together, there is a negative impact on the guy. The guy tends to be engrossed—be less committed to the current relationship. When they do marry, he is a less-committed husband.

What they found out was that there was no negative effect like that on the woman. She just comes into the relationship with a high-level of commitment. It’s like: “Ladies, if you want the commitment level of your guy to decrease in the current relationship and in the future marriage relationship, then cohabitation is *exactly* what you’re looking for.”

Again, this is *secular* research that is finding this out. Cohabitation does not put our boyfriends on the track to domesticity in marriage—it’s not moving them in the marital direction. It’s actually keeping them and cementing them more in the boyfriend direction. Girls need to understand it’s not taking your guy in the direction that you want him to go.

**Dennis:** Glenn, I know that you are familiar with Dr. George Gilder and the book that he wrote.

**Glenn:** Yes, absolutely.
**Dennis:** It was first called, I think, *Sexual Suicide*.

**Glenn:** Exactly.

**Dennis:** Then it became *Men and Marriage*.

**Glenn:** Yes.

**Dennis:** One of the things that he wrote about, as a Harvard sociologist, was how women are giving up their sexual power and their power as women by moving in with guys and not holding out the gift of giving herself to him until the guy makes a commitment and moves into a committed marriage relationship.

**Glenn:** He was really the guy who put out the idea that—I mean, ironically—marriage is a feminist institution, in the best sense of the word. It is the relationship that empowers the woman. I would encourage anybody who is interested in understanding what marriage is about to read that book by George Gilder, *Men and Marriage*. It’s a powerful classic book.

**Dennis:** Here’s what I want you to answer, though: “What is taking place with our young ladies for this wholesale sell-out?” I mean, is it what Bob just said—is it they’re afraid?—they’re looking around in the culture and seeing the average age of men going up to 27, 28, and beyond before they make a commitment to get married. Are they going, “If I want to have a chance of this happening…”—is that the reason?

**Bob:** I think they’re thinking: “I either get involved, sexually, and move in and do what the culture’s saying to do, or I join a nunnery. Those are my options in today’s modern world.”

**Glenn:** Right; right.

**Bob:** “I either participate or I’m off the playing field and out of the picture.”

**Glenn:** Yes, that’s the big $64,000 question. There are a number of answers to it, and we can debate about what the right answers are; but first of all, we do need to understand that this generation—the Pugh Research Group said, last year, that the millennial generation / the generation coming of age today—is the most pro-marriage group alive today.

**Bob:** Wow!

**Glenn:** That’s a remarkable thing. They’re pro-marriage because of what they were denied. They saw most of their parents’ marriages fall apart; and none of them are going: “You know what? I’m going to give that same gift to my kids.”
Bob: Yes.

Glenn: They want marriage to work. So, the women want to marry. I think too many of them see these kind-of-delayed adolescent guys—the gamer guys, with their hats turned around backwards—and like: “Okay, how am I going to get my guy to the marriage stage? Well, if I move in with him…” They tend to think of cohabitation as the on-ramp to marriage.

Dennis: Like: “If you move in with him, you can domesticate him—

Glenn: Absolutely!

Dennis: —“and he’ll move toward marriage.”

Glenn: Absolutely! It’s the conveyor belt, if you will, or the escalator to marriage—once you get on it, it’s just inevitable. But, again, what the research is showing is—a cohabiting woman has less influence upon where the relationship goes than a woman who is not cohabiting. Women who move in with a guy have a harder time moving that relationship towards marriage because, again, the relationship is on the guy’s terms.

He’s got what he wants! He’s got access to regular sex. He’s got somebody to care for him—to cook for him and to clean for him. That’s another thing! In cohabiting relationships, guys—it is shown—help out with the housework less often. A husband—a man with a ring on his finger—helps out with housework eight hours more a week than a live-in boyfriend does, and he complains less about it. In a way, marriage is the institution—this is Gilder’s point—marriage domesticates men. Cohabitation does not domesticate men.

Dennis: Gilder’s point was cohabitation allows a man to be a barbarian—

Glenn: That’s exactly right.

Dennis: —to keep his options open.

Okay, now, I’m going to move us out of the—we’ve been hitting some statistics and the sociologists.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: I want Glenn Stanton to put on his “daddy” hat. You’ve got five kids?

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: How many of them are daughters?
Glenn: I’ve got four girls.

Dennis: Four girls.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: Alright. Knowing all of this, Glenn, as their daddy, what in the world are you and Jackie doing in their lives to prepare them for this culture, and the messaging of this culture, and the men that they’re going to rub shoulders with in this culture?

Glenn: Well, Dennis, that’s the other part of the answer to your question is—it is a daddy issue; okay? “Why are these girls moving in with guys?” I was talking to one of your folks here. She was telling me about a lot of people in her extended family—beautiful young girls—who are moving in with guys. I asked her, “Tell me their daddy stories.” She said: “You know what? For a number of them, their daddies were just not on the scene.”

The main thing that I want to do with my girls is to say: “You are amazing! I feel sorry for you,”—I say this jokingly—“I feel sorry for you because there is no guy out there that is good enough for you.” [Laughter] You know? They’re getting that message that: “Okay. It’s going to be a pretty special guy who deserves my affection.” Girls who cohabit and girls who are willing to make the compromise are girls who haven’t had the kind of good father-love to say: “I have a man in my life who cares for me, who would die for me, who would take a bullet for me—no question. I am not going to settle for the first kind of suave guy who comes along.”

Dennis: What I hear you saying is for daddies, first of all, to be there.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: And secondly, to be connected—

Glenn: Absolutely.

Dennis: —heart to heart / tethered into his daughter’s life—

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: —knowing what’s going on / helping her navigate difficult issues and all the traps of the culture. The real challenge for dads is to not unplug and to not be afraid because this little girl he used to hold in his lap now grows up and becomes a beautiful woman. He’s going: “Man, she’s beautiful! I’ve got to be careful here, you know, as a dad, physically—still hugging her, and loving on her, and speaking truth to her / coaching her and preparing her.”
Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: That’s the key thing I want to say: “Daddies need to be intentional to prepare their daughters for this culture.”

Glenn: Absolutely!

Bob: Well, and I think the point is—we’re raising children today in a culture where the norm is going to be living together before you get married. Why do we think our kids are not going to do what everybody else is doing unless we have given them some compelling reasons about why that’s a bad idea? Glenn, I think your book does a great job of spelling it out. Hopefully, the things we’ve talked about today are going to help a lot of moms and dads—and also a lot of young people—think about this issue because—whether you look at it sociologically or spiritually—this is a bad choice.

We have copies of Glenn’s book, The Ring Makes All the Difference. It’s available in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can go, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper left-hand corner of the screen that says, “GO DEEPER.” You’ll see Glenn’s book right there. Again, you can order it online. The website is: FamilyLifeToday.com. You can also request a copy of the book when you call 1-800-FL-TODAY: 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY.”

You know, I’m thinking, Dennis, about the times that you and I speak at our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways. We get to speak to the engaged couples, who are coming to the Weekend to Remember. There are almost always engaged couples, who are there, who are living together—they’ve been living together for awhile. Our goal in that time together with them is to try to get them to adjust their thinking and to start thinking about marriage from God’s perspective rather than from the cultural perspective.

We’re committed, here at FamilyLife, to pointing people in a biblical direction when it comes to issues related to marriage and family. We want to provide practical biblical encouragement/coaching and, ultimately, help for your marriage and for your family. There are a group of people who share that vision with us—it’s those of you who support this ministry with occasional donations or those of you who are Legacy Partners, who donate each month to help support FamilyLife Today. We’re grateful for your partnership with us; and we just want to say, “Thank you for being part of the team.”

If you can help with a donation today, we’d like to express our thanks by making available a couple of books—one from Dennis Rainey for men—a book called Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood / one from Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Mary Kassian—it’s a book for women called True Woman 201: Interior Design. We’re going to send you both books as a thank-you gift when you make a donation of, at least, $50 in
support of the ministry of FamilyLife Today, which you can do by going to FamilyLifeToday.com and clicking the link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen that says, “I CARE,”—make an online donation and request the books; or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY—make a donation over the phone and request these two books; or you can mail your donation to us. Our mailing address is FamilyLife Today at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and our zip code is 72223.

Now, tomorrow, we want to talk more about why living together is fundamentally a qualitatively different kind of relationship than being married. We’ll explore that tomorrow with Glenn Stanton. Hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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