Bob: When you move in together / live together outside of marriage, Glenn Stanton says you start to learn some patterns that will not serve you well in the future.

Glenn: The cohabitating relationship is, qualitatively, a different kind of relationship than a marriage relationship. What it is—is a couple coming together and negotiating under the terms of lack of total commitment. You’re learning to build your relationship with that holding back, if you will—you know, you’ve still got cards behind your back, basically. The sociologists are telling us that cohabiting couples learn—they learn the behavior of negotiating in less healthy ways.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, June 18th. Our host is the President of FamilyLife®, Dennis Rainey, and I’m Bob Lepine. If you want to be happily married someday, forever and ever, moving in together is a bad idea. We’ll explain why today. Stay tuned.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You know, I got all excited when I saw what we were going to be talking about today. I saw the title of the book and I thought, “Cool!—going to get to talk about The Lord of the Rings—I have always wanted to do! The Ring Makes All the Difference—I’m thinking: “This is about Frodo. Cool!” [Laughter]

Dennis: I’m glad you used that as an illustration and didn’t say, “I thought we were going to talk about the circus.” [Laughter]

Bob: The circus?!

Glenn: Oh, the ring—yes! There you go.

Dennis: Well, we do have the author of the book, The Ring Makes All the Difference. Glenn Stanton joins us again on FamilyLifeToday. Glenn, welcome back.

Glenn: Thank you. It’s good to be with you.
Dennis: Glenn works with *Focus on the Family*® in Colorado Springs, where he and his wife and their five children live. He’s a researcher/debater, and he’s a passionate follower of Christ who is a champion for commitment in marriages that go the distance.

Bob: You don’t think Tolkien was trying to make a statement—“throw the ring in Mordor”—he wasn’t trying to get rid of marriage with that?

Glenn: No, not at all.

Bob: Just making sure.

Glenn: I do think he was trying to piggyback on the fame of *this book*. [Laughter]

Bob: Right.

Dennis: Oh, that’s where you’re going! I was watching that; and I was going, “Where is he going to take that?”

Glenn: The fact that it was 40 years earlier is of no consequence to me.

Bob: It was a premonition on his part.

Dennis: We are talking about the prevalence of cohabitation in our culture. I want you to just quickly give a few statistics of how prevalent it is. Then, I want you to talk about the Christian community—

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: —how are we doing in terms of cohabiting?

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: I have a great story I want to tell you of a church that addressed the issue.

So, back to the big picture: “How prevalent is cohabitation today?”

Glenn: Well, it has grown anywhere from 15- to 17-fold since 1960. Twenty-five percent of women today are living with somebody. An additional 25 percent have lived with somebody in the recent past. Nearly 60 percent—

Dennis: Hold it! You said 50 percent of women are either in a cohabiting relationship today—

Glenn: —or have been in the past.
Dennis: I have to tell you—I think I live in a bubble! There are some of our listeners going to go: “Oh my goodness. [Sounding like an old woman] He’s down there in the hills of Arkansas. Bless his heart, back there.”

Glenn: But that does go to your other question—is that, I mean—the other point is that 60 percent of marriages today are preceded by some form of cohabitation—that is, the great majority of couples marrying today have lived together before—but sociologists will tell you that people with a serious religious conviction are significantly less likely to cohabit. We’ve got far too many young people cohabiting in the church today, but it is not similar that the cohabitation rate is as similar in the church as it is in the world. Just like—and I wish that all pastors would know this—the divorce rate is not as similar in the church as it is in the world.

Bob: So that statistic—that’s kind of been batted around that says—

Glenn: Absolutely; completely false.

Bob: —“But the statistic says that more people who are Christians have been divorced than people who are non-Christians.”

Glenn: It’s just not true.

Bob: Well, what’s true?

Glenn: What’s true, first of all, is—for people who really do take their faith seriously, there is a significant drop in risk of divorce. What they mean by that is—and it’s not just Christians / but people who go to church or religious services, not every Sunday, but more Sundays out of the month than not, read religious texts together / the Bible, pray together—their risk of divorce is dramatically lower than people in the general population. We need to know that faith really does make a difference in our lives and in relationships.

Bob: Casual church-going or casual church membership doesn’t make the difference?

Glenn: See, that’s the point. Okay: “Have your name on a church roll? Guess what? It makes no difference whatsoever.” I mean, that’s not shocking.

Dennis: I want to go back to my illustration about how prevalent this is in the Christian community.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: This is by no way any kind of a measurement of the overall problem; but I’m in a mentoring relationship with a man in Dallas, who heads up a church of over 3,500 people. He was doing a series on being single. He decided, at the end of the series, he
would make the offer to the singles, who were cohabiting—he said: “I would like to invite you out of your cohabiting relationship into marriage. What the church is willing to do—I’ve cleared it with the elder board of the church—we’re willing to pay for the wedding, with three weeks of marriage preparation. We’ll provide the rings, the tux, and the wedding gown. We’ll provide the flowers around the wedding, but I want you to meet me here this afternoon.” I think it was 4:00 or something in the afternoon—ultimately, 20 couples came forward. He said, “Here was the interesting thing.” He said, “They were all ages.”

Glenn: Wow!

Dennis: You would think they would be under 35/40—somewhere in there.

Glenn: Exactly!

Dennis: That would be my guess, in there.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: He said: “No; no. We had young ones living together—all the way into their 60s.”

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: And I loved his approach, Glenn, because he didn’t point a bony finger at the audience and say, “You wretched, dirty sinners out there,” which we all are.

Glenn: Right.

Dennis: We all have our issues; okay? But he uplifted marriage for singles; and he said, “The church believes in marriage so much, we’re going to put our money where our mouth is.”

Glenn: Yes.

Bob: Glenn, I was at one of our Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways. We do some breakouts for singles during the getaway to talk about getting ready for marriage, and “How do you know if this is the right one?” and “How can you work this out?” My friend was doing the speaking, and I was in the back of the room. He was making the case that: “It’s not a good idea to live together / to have sex together. You should keep the relationship pure.”

This guy raised his hand and said, “I’ve got a question.” He said: “We have a 2-year-old. We’re planning on getting married in December,”—this was in May—“We’re planning on getting married in December; but we’re living together, and we’ve got a 2-year-old. Are
you suggesting that I should move out until December?” Before I tell you how he answered the question, what would you have said?

**Glenn:** Yes. That’s an interesting thing; and that’s the other point—is we see cohabitation, not just for the transitional college-age students.

**Dennis:** Oh, yes; yes.

**Glenn:** You know, people are having kids in these relationships—they’re like the couple down the street. I would say, in this sense, that: “Yes, you’ve got a child together; but there would be something really wonderful to separate for a while / be separated, with the plan of coming together. Your coming together in marriage is going to be more precious / more valuable. You, sir, are making a comment about the woman in your life to say, ‘I want to do what’s right by you.’ She’s going to appreciate that. That’s going to do so much for her heart—to be the dignified guy / the valiant guy, to say, ‘Okay, I want to start over now.’ Yes, okay; the water has been muddied up a bit, but you know what? You can start over—not completely over—but you can make that movement to say, ‘I want to do it right from here on out.’”

**Bob:** That’s a great answer. My friend said, “Yes, you ought to move out; but I’d hurry up the wedding date.”

**Glenn:** Exactly.

**Bob:** “Why wait until December?” “Well, that’s the only time the family can get together.” He said, “You go ahead and get married, and then get the family together in December and have some kind of a party.”

**Glenn:** Absolutely.

**Bob:** Yes: “Move out—have there be a time of separation—and then get back together.”

**Glenn:** Exactly. The little space-time is very good—let the dust settle a little bit there.

**Dennis:** The only thing I would add to what our speaker counseled this couple would be to say: “You know what? Move out. Get someone to mentor you immediately into preparing to turn this relationship into a marriage. Go through our marriage preparation material. Establish a mentoring relationship now, move the wedding date up, and then have that same mentoring couple walk them through the first 12, 18, 24 months of their marriage because just saying, ‘I do,’ and getting committed to one another is not going to solve all the issues you’ve created, just because you’ve made a commitment.”

**Bob:** Talk about that because I’m sitting here thinking, “If I’m a guy, and we had been living together, and it’s been going okay—we get along / we’re doing alright. Yes, we’re
going to get married; and we’re looking forward to that,”—I’m thinking, “What’s the big whoop?”

Glenn: Yes.

Bob: “Okay—yes, we’re going to get legal, and we’re going to get a piece of paper; but it’s basically going to be the same thing it’s been”; right?

Glenn: No, absolutely not. That’s the point, Dennis, that the sociologists are finding out—that a cohabiting relationship is, qualitatively, a different kind of relationship than a marriage relationship. What it is—is a couple coming together and negotiating, under the terms of, “He’s still holding stuff under the table,” and “She’s still holding stuff under the table.” It’s lack of total commitment. You’re learning to build your relationship with that holding back, if you will. You’ve still got cards behind your back, basically.

The sociologists are telling us that cohabiting couples learn—they learn the behavior of negotiating in less healthy ways / more destructive ways. That’s the thing—it’s not just, “Okay, let’s put rings into the situation,” but “We’ve got to relearn how we’re negotiating with each other / how we’re dealing with one another.” That’s very, very wise information.

Dennis: Genesis, Chapter 2, verse 24 says: “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.” There’s the process the Bible places.

Glenn: Exactly!

Dennis: You leave father and mother, you cleave—you make a commitment / you become one—and then you get involved in the process of nakedness, which is transparency/intimacy.

Glenn: —vulnerability.

Dennis: It’s not achieved on the wedding night.

Glenn: Right.

Dennis: It’s a process of getting to know another person and creating the safety. This is what drives me crazy for cohabiting couples—I wonder how two people work out a relationship, where there aren’t walls built around that relationship that are based on a promise?

Glenn: Yes.
**Dennis:** Even the shakiness of the promise / of the covenant that, "I take you for the rest of my life,"—that’s shaky enough, just to make good on that—but to work out the relationship without a promise?

**Glenn:** Yes, yes.

**Dennis:** It is like, “How does that work?” You've just said, “It doesn't work.”

**Glenn:** It *doesn’t* work.

**Dennis:** It gets real dysfunctional and lots of bad habits that carry over into the marriage relationship.

**Glenn:** It is interesting, Dennis and Bob. That verse—it’s funny—when I sign books—that’s the verse that I write in there because that’s what this book is about. The husband shall leave his mother and father. What that means is—literally, leave mother and father—but it means leave all other relationships that are important to you and focus on this one, which is your wife, and cleave to her. The King James says, “cleave”; others, “cling to / hold fast to.” “She’s the only game in town now,”—that is what marriage is about.

This book is the social science explanation of what God is saying in that truth. Every one of these sociologists and psychiatrists are saying: “You know what? Yes—leaving and cleaving—saying, ‘No,’ to everybody else and clinging to that one person benefits you, it benefits your children, it benefits society, and it benefits the relationship.”

**Bob:** You titled your book *The Ring Makes All the Difference*; and obviously, it’s not the ring that makes the difference.

**Glenn:** Right. The ring is a symbol.

**Bob:** Is it essentially the commitment to one another / that unconditional commitment; or is there more to it than just, “I’m fully committed to you—legally bound in my commitment to you”; or is there something more than that that makes a difference?

**Glenn:** It really is largely that commitment and the clarity that comes with the commitment. This is an interesting point that’s more a part of the research itself. The scholars are finding out that—and this isn’t Christian orthodoxy per se—but when couples move in together after the engagement, they do not tend to show the kind of negative consequences that pre-engagement couples do.

That is not because post-engagement co-habitation is just fine, but what it means is—I like to say this: “When mother-in-law has ordered her wedding dress, when the cake’s being ordered, when the wedding hall has been rented, that guy is on the hook. Everybody knows what the nature of the relationship is.” It’s not right, morally; but it’s a
different kind of relationship than the regular cohabiting relationship. That is because, in a sense, the promise has been made—it hasn’t been consummated or culminated yet—but it has been made there. The social scientists are telling us that: “Yes, that promise really does make the difference.” That is what the ring is a symbol of—this unending promise—that: “For good and for bad, I am going to commit myself to you.”

Bob: And the words of that promise that we say, in the traditional Christian wedding, “...for better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness or health, forsaking all others.” I mean, we kind of go through this laundry list that most people think is just lovely poetry. No, we’re really signing away a lot when we say that stuff.

Glenn: It’s interesting—Erich Fromm, this secular thinker, wrote this wonderful thing—where he said, “The wedding vows are predicated on the expectation that things are not going to go well.” It’s not about, “I’m going to love you as long as I feel love for you.”

Dennis: Yes! [Laughing]

Glenn: It’s, “I’m going to love you, even when things turn south.” That’s the thing about marriage, and that’s why it’s a public institution. My father-in-law heard me make the promise. So, when I later on say: “You know what? I’m out of here.” “No, wait! You made the promise.” Our friends hear the promise. It’s this public declaration of: “Okay; we are separating ourselves now from everybody else, and we’re making ourselves into new kind of individuals, where we come together as one flesh. We are a new kind of entity, as a married couple.”

Dennis: The way you establish that new entity is by signing a pre-nuptial agreement. [Laughter]

Glenn: Exactly! That’s the same sort of thing of like, “Okay, I want to make sure that things work out in my best interest,” which poisons the relationship.

Dennis: That’s the pre-nup the culture wants you to sign. I’m talking about the only pre-nup to sign, which is a marriage covenant.

Glenn: Exactly.

Dennis: What is a pre-nup but the terms of agreement for, “How we’re going to terminate this relationship”? The nature of the Christian marriage covenant—

Glenn: You know what? That’s an excellent point.

Dennis:—is a promise to another person, “I, Dennis, take you, Barbara. Here are the terms under which we will terminate this relationship—one or both of us will die.”

Glenn: Exactly!
Dennis: “We’re sticking to this relationship.” Single people, who are getting ready to get married, and who are about to sign any other kind of pre-nup—

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: —forget it! Toss the other pre-nups and come to the Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. At the end of the getaway, you know what you’ll receive? You will receive a hard copy of the marriage covenant. I’m going to tell you—I’ve been all over the country, in a lot of people’s homes, because we’ve trained over two million people at the Weekend to Remember. A bunch of them have these covenants hanging up in their home. I’ve had some couples tell me—when they’ve had arguments, they’ve both stopped and pointed up at the covenant to say: “I’m in. I’m in. We may disagree. We may not be able to get this worked out right now, at this moment, but you know what? I’m not going anywhere.”

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: To the single people that we’re talking to here today—this ought to scare you to death—all this stuff about cohabitation.

Glenn: Yes.

Dennis: I mean, if you can’t trust anyone before you get married, how are you going to trust them just because they say, “I do”? It needs to be built upon a discipline of two people, who build trust into one another’s lives, and then they make the most sacred pledge and promise two people ever make in a lifetime. They make it before Almighty God and they say, “Before God, I take you.”

Glenn: I’m not a big, big fan of arranged marriages; but there is a very important thing to—

Dennis: You will be by the time you get those five—[Laughter]

Bob: When those girls get older; yes.

Dennis: You will change your tune because I didn’t start out that way; but I thought, “If I could arrange this, this would be a whole lot better than this whole dating thing.”

Glenn: Exactly.

Dennis: Go ahead though, Glenn—make your point.

Bob: Your girls did just fine on their own.
**Dennis:** They did just fine; but I’m talking about, in the midst of the dating deal, as it was occurring in the teenage years. It was like: “Oh, my goodness! This is not a good system right now.”

**Glenn:** Yes, you’re right; but it is this idea that we tend to leave the most important decision that people make in their life, after their decision for Christ—their marriage relationship is: “You know what, kids? It’s all up to you. You just decide what you think is best for you,”—whereas, for all other cultures—they consult the parents. It’s not the parents’ decision, but it’s not that the parents don’t have any say in it. The parents, the extended family, the spiritual family around you—ask people: “Do you think this guy’s right for me?” “Do you think this gal is right for me?” Get the wisdom / get the insight—these people care for you / they love you.

I would say: “Consult the people around you—who have a little more wisdom, a little more experience with life, a little more experience with relationships—get their feedback on: ‘What do you think we need to work on? What do we need to be aware of? What do we need to be mindful of?’” rather than just saying, ‘Okay, it’s just about you kids, who have no experience in life whatsoever.’”

We need to make it more of a community sort of thing, which is exactly what marriage is. It’s exactly why we invite the community to our weddings.

**Bob:** I think we need more people, who understand the implications of cohabitation, because, again, the culture is saying, “Look, this is a great thing.” Folks just need to understand: “No, if you look at it carefully, this is like a Fifth Avenue watch—not one they sell in a store—but the kind a guy has got under his coat—it looks good / looks really good, but buy it and see how long it lasts!”

**Glenn:** Exactly!

**Dennis:** “It says it’s Rolex—[Laughter]”

**Bob:** That’s right.

**Glenn:** “And they couldn’t say it if it wasn’t true.” [Laughter]

**Dennis:** That’s exactly right! I would say, coupled with that: “They need to understand the negative consequences of cohabiting; but they also need to understand the benefits of marriage, as God designed it in the Scripture. It is not the perfect institution because it’s made of two imperfect people.”

**Glenn:** Right.

10
Dennis: “But that’s why the Bible was written—to help two imperfect people know how to live out, in relationship with their God, and with one another, and with their offspring for a lifetime.”

Bob: If folks want more information about the Weekend to Remember marriage getaway, we still have a couple of them going on this summer. Then, in the fall, we’ll kick off a full season of Weekend to Remember getaways. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper left-hand corner of the screen that says, “GO DEEPER.” You’ll see information about the Weekend to Remember, along with information about the video event that we’ve put together called The Art of Marriage®. If there’s not a Weekend to Remember happening in a location near where you live, you can host your very own Art of Marriage Friday night/Saturday video conference. Invite friends and have a great focus on marriage in your church, in your neighborhood, in your community. Do it wherever it makes sense.

There’s information about the Weekend to Remember / there’s information about The Art of Marriage. And there’s information about Glenn Stanton’s book, which is called The Ring Makes All the Difference. You can order a copy of that book from us, online. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com. You’ll get information about all of these things when you click the link in the upper left-hand corner of the screen that says, “GO DEEPER.” Or, if you’d prefer to order a copy of Glenn’s book by phone, the toll-free number is 1-800-358-6329; that’s 1-800:“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then, the word, “TODAY.”

You know, one of the verses in the Bible that has always stuck with me—and I remember learning this Bible verse, back when I was in my twenties—Romans, Chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, where it says that we are to present our bodies as a “living sacrifice.” It’s our “spiritual service of worship to God.” But then, in verse two, it goes on to say we are “not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.”

Here, at FamilyLife, our commitment is to hold up God’s Word / God’s truth about marriage and family. Wherever the culture is going, just to say, “Okay, that’s what the culture is telling you; but here’s what the Bible has been telling us for thousands of years.”

We want to thank those of you who partner with us in making this possible, either as Legacy Partners / donating to the ministry each month or as folks who occasionally make a donation in support of this ministry. Maybe God has used FamilyLife Today in some significant way in your marriage and your family, and you’d like to make a donation today—you can do that. Go, online, to FamilyLifeToday.com. Click the link in the upper right-hand corner of the screen that says, “I CARE,” and make an online donation. Or call 1-800-FL-TODAY and make a donation over the phone. Or you can mail a donation to us at PO Box 7111, Little Rock, AR; and the zip code is 72223.
If you can help with a donation today of, at least, $50, we’d like to send you, as a thank-you gift, a book from Dennis Rainey for men called *Stepping Up: A Call to Courageous Manhood*, and a book for women from Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Mary Kassian called *True Woman 201: Interior Design*. Both books are our way of saying, “Thank you,” when you support the ministry today with a donation of, at least, $50.

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to talk about the whole issue of how cohabiting couples handle money. I mean: “What do you do if you move in together? Do you keep ‘my money’ / ‘your money’? How do you handle the groceries?” We’ll find out what most couples are doing and how that can be a challenge when we talk tomorrow to Glenn Stanton. I hope you can be here with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider [donating today](#) to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2015 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com