

LIBERTY PARK INN®

A Syndicated Column

Name: **Cohabiting**

By: David Henry © 2012

“Hi, David,” Nathan said as he entered the lobby. “I see you’re reading an article on cohabiting. What do you think about that subject?”

Nathan is a successful salesman and a fellow Christian so we enjoy discussing religion and morality when he’s in town.

“I don’t know what to think, Nathan,” I replied. “As an American citizen who believes strongly in the constitution, I’ve always assumed that people who cohabit were just exercising their legal right to a common law marriage. But recently I’ve begun to wonder if I’m right in assuming that.”

“Why do you say that,” Nathan inquired?

“That famous story in the Bible about the woman at the well in John 4 has caused me to doubt my previous position on this issue,” I replied. “Jesus made a clear distinction between this woman’s five husbands and the person she was cohabiting with at that time.”

“That’s a good observation,” Nathan replied. “I’ve been studying this matter of cohabiting myself lately, but I hadn’t noticed that story.”

“I just noticed it,” I replied. “And so I’m trying to figure out what is really right. I’m a firm believer in both the constitution and the Bible and I’m trying to be a good citizen and a good Christian too.”

“Well,” Nathan replied, “Maybe the key issue is the intention of the people who are cohabiting. Do they plan to live together in a committed, monogamous relationship with each other for the rest of their lives? If they do, it seems to me that those people are indeed exercising their constitutional right to a common law marriage. But on the other hand, if they are just out to have some fun and they have no intention to stay together, then it seems to me that those people are breaking the seventh commandment to not commit adultery.”

“I see what you mean,” I replied. “And that could be very significant. There are always negative consequences when we violate the principles of God’s word.”

“That’s true,” Nathan agreed and then he added, “I don’t know if you realized this, but cohabitation has increased in America more than 1500 percent in the last half century from about 450,000 unmarried couples to 7.5 million. And some people think that cohabiting will increase their chances of having a good marriage. So this subject is something we need to understand and deal with.”

“Yes,” I replied.

Nathan continued, “Some people are cohabiting out of necessity. For example some people are so poor they feel they have to cohabit so they can afford to live.”

“In this economy, I can see why they could feel that way,” I commented.

“But,” Nathan continued, “I’m told that many older couples are also being forced to cohabit out of financial necessity. Apparently the way social security operates right now, retired people could lose their social security income if they get married.”

“That’s terrible,” I replied. “If that’s true, then our government is causing people who believe it is morally wrong, to live together outside of marriage in violation of their conscience for the sake of financial survival.”

“That’s probably true,” Nathan replied. “But I’m told there are other reasons that older people sometimes cohabit instead of getting married. If they just cohabit, they won’t get their financial affairs entangled together. This makes it much easier for the families to distribute the inheritance when that older person dies.”

“That’s interesting,” I replied.

Nathan continued, “Earlier studies on this subject indicated that young people who cohabited were significantly more likely to get divorced. However, some current data shows that people who do cohabit before getting married have about the same chances of success as people who

don’t.”

“What do you think caused that change,” I asked?

“I don’t really know,” Nathan replied. “And not everyone agrees. But there are still some significant downsides to living together without getting married.”

“Like what,” I asked.

“Well,” Nathan replied, “one thing is that women who are cohabiting tend to gain weight.”

I thought about that for a moment and commented, “For many women that could be a real motivation to not cohabit.”

“Yes,” Nathan responded. “But there are other downsides that are actually more significant.”

“Ok,” I said. “Tell me some.”

“Well,” Nathan replied, “Meg Jay wrote an op-ed piece on this subject that went viral earlier this year. She is a clinical psychologist at the University of Virginia who counsels people who have cohabited and she has seen the problems it can cause.”

“So what does she have to say,” I inquired?

“Nathan replied, “Contrary to other studies, she says couples who cohabit before marriage without a clear commitment to each other do ‘tend to be less satisfied with their marriages and more likely to get divorced than couples who do not.’ She calls this the ‘cohabitation effect.’ She also says that once they are cohabiting it’s not as easy to get out of the relationship as many people think it will be. She warns that ‘living together before marriage should be met with great caution, if not downright avoided.’”

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Meg Jay’s op-ed piece was published in the New York Times in April. She says she is not for or against living together, but she wants young people to know they may be increasing their chances of making a mistake if they do.

Liberty Park Inn® is a syndicated column about issues and current events featuring conversations in an imaginary hotel. You may contact the author through his website at www.libertyparkinn.com.