

‘What the world teaches on any given subject is often at odds with God’s commands regarding that same issue. Dr Chris Richards and Dr Liz Jones provide a much-needed resource: one that encourages teens to be biblically literate and thus equipped to discern what is good and true. By clearly defining and explaining six key issues at the forefront of our culture, and by guiding teens through Scripture passages that address each of these topics, Richards and Jones help to prepare teens to live in such a way that is honouring to God.’

Erika Allen, author of *ESV Prayer Journals*

‘Liz and Chris bring not only a clarity of teaching, but also a vulnerability of spirit as they share with the reader key biblical principles, on some of the most contested issues of our generation. As a young person reading this, wrestle with these chapters, even if their content may seem counter cultural, and unearth some wonderful truths as you pray about following Christ in your relationships and actions.’

Steve Beegoo, Head of Education at Christian Concern

‘I cannot speak highly enough of this timely book. It is unafraid to tackle the issues of our day, which are of grave concern to most right-thinking people. Fact-based, Biblio-centric, warm-hearted, clear thinking, it is a must read for all teens and pre-teens and, or preferably with, their parents.’

Ann Benton, author of *Parenting Against the Tide* and *The Fruitful Home*

‘In a world that values individual preference and feelings above all else, this book reminds us that God’s ways are right and good. A wide range of subjects are covered in a clear, faithful and sensitive way. There is enough detail to warn where needed, without creating unhelpful curiosity. Our young people are looking for straightforward answers on these topics. Dr Chris Richards and Dr Liz Jones are trusted sources for biblical principles and godly wisdom.’

**Matthew Seymour, Pastor, Emmanuel Church,
Leamington Spa**



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Laying good foundations

The aim of this book is to help you navigate some difficult issues which have become part of our society in the last 70 years. During this time we have become a more ‘secular’ society. ‘Secular’ describes a society where God has been rejected, with the result that many of God’s laws, which used to be the foundation of Western society, have been put aside one by one. People are now increasingly allowed to do whatever they want to do, which is not necessarily good. This was the chaotic situation at the end of the Old Testament book of Judges, where it says, ‘Everyone did what was right in his own eyes’ (Judges 21:25).

This way of thinking has especially affected our society’s attitude towards marriage and sexual relationships. It is reflected in our laws, in mainstream media and on social media, which now reject the Bible’s teaching that marriage

Challenges to living God's way

is a lifelong relationship between a man and a woman. Many people in our society encourage sexual intimacy outside marriage, rather than seeing it as a special gift from God, only to be shared within marriage.

As young people, sooner or later, you will face challenges in this area. You will need to be *wise* not to be taken in because sometimes these challenges come in very subtle ways (for example, assumptions made in what you are taught at school), and you will need to be *strong* because sometimes the challenges come in very pressurising ways (through your friends and peers, for example). We have written this book to help prepare you for this.

The first few chapters focus on six big moral issues. Each of these chapters concludes with a testimony showing how God has helped someone facing the issue. The last three chapters of the book discuss what the Bible says about sexual purity and marriage. This will help you to honour God in your personal life.

The writer of the Bible book of Ecclesiastes talks about how he did not find satisfaction and pleasure in all the things that this world offered him, even though he was very wealthy and powerful. In the final chapter, he makes a particular call to young people with these words:

*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth...
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the
whole duty of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13)*

Dr Chris Richards + Dr Liz Jones

As two paediatricians, we have seen many young people damaged, and many families destroyed, by wrong decisions made in sexual relationships. You have much of your life ahead of you – so remember God, your Creator, and keep his commandments at the centre of your life. This will encourage you to invest in the future rather than in what appears to give pleasure in the short term. Although it won't always seem like it, God's ways really are good. He made us, he loves us and he does know what's best for us. We hope that this book will help you think through these issues, and realise that this is true.



Six big
issues

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Cohabitation

Cohabitation is also called 'living together'. It describes a couple sharing a home and being sexually intimate with each other when they are not married. It is seen by many as a stage before marriage or as an alternative to marriage. Cohabitation has become very common in our society. It has almost become accepted as a necessary stage in a relationship that is moving towards long-term commitment.

Fact box

- *In the UK, cohabiting couple families were the fastest-growing family type over the last decade with an increase of nearly 20% from 2.86 million in 2011 to 3.43 million in 2021.¹ In the US, the numbers are also growing, with an increase from 7.6 million to 9.6 million over the same period.²*

Challenges to living God's way

- *Over 80% of marriages in England and Wales take place when the couple are living at the same address prior to the wedding.³ In the US, it is now estimated that over 70% of couples live together before marrying.⁴*

Why do people decide to cohabit?

If you ask people who are cohabiting why they are doing so, you get some surprising answers. Many say that they did not have long discussions or make plans to cohabit. They got into a relationship with someone they met and liked, and one thing led to another. It was just easier to live together in the same house. However, this slide into a relationship makes the couple vulnerable to conflicting agendas and painful misunderstandings. One of our friends had a meal with two students, a boy and a girl, who were cohabiting. He asked them how long they planned to stay together. They both answered him at the same time. The girl said, 'For the rest of my life.' The boy said, 'Until the end of term.' They had obviously not discussed the future in any detail.

There are various reasons why couples choose to cohabit before or instead of getting married. Some say that they are 'keeping their options open' or 'just seeing how things go'. In other words, they do not want to make a firm decision about the future. They are not willing to commit themselves fully to the other person and, specifically, they are not willing to commit themselves to the other person

in marriage. Others feel emotionally obliged to cohabit because it was expected of them by their partner and any resistance to the idea might seem like an expression of a lack of love.

Often people say that they have chosen to cohabit to find out whether they are suited to each other. Perhaps they think that they cannot make the big commitment of marriage until they know more about the other person. They think that they need to test how well they get on before making a legal commitment, and this means living in the same home and finding out whether they are sexually compatible. If things go well, they may decide to marry. Maybe when a child comes along, then they will give the child increased security by getting married.

Some people feel that marriage is likely to be in some way limiting and see living together as a way of maintaining more independence. Some say they like the freedom of sexual intimacy without serious commitment. Perhaps they like the thought of moving from one partner to another when they feel bored or unfulfilled by their current relationship, or the ability to move because of work. They think that they can do this without any damage to themselves or their partners.

People who have experienced breakdown in their own family may feel anxious about committing to marriage. They fear that they too might be unable to sustain the commitment of marriage and think that cohabitation will remove the potential need to divorce.

Challenges to living God's way

Sometimes couples cohabit for financial reasons. They think that because they cannot afford a house and a grand wedding, it would be better to move in together while they save up their money. They might think it would be cheaper to live together, rather than separately.

Some older couples cohabit because they are lonely and want companionship but do not want the commitment of marrying, perhaps for the second time, because their previous spouse has died.

What makes marriage distinct and special?

Marriage is different from cohabitation because it involves promises or vows made in front of witnesses. We read in the book of Genesis, 'a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Genesis 2:24, NIVUK). This describes how God brought Adam and Eve together as husband and wife and set up the pattern for all future marriages. The promises of marriage express a commitment by a couple to God's design.

These promises or vows are recognised by the law of the land. At a wedding, there must be at least two witnesses present to hear the vows, as well as a person authorised to register the marriage and issue the marriage certificate. Most people invite a much larger group of witnesses to their wedding, usually their family and close friends.

Legally, the couple only have to promise that they are **allowed** to marry and that they **choose** to take each other to be husband and wife.⁵ However, in most weddings the

bride and bridegroom make a series of profound promises to each other:⁶

- The couple promise to love each other *exclusively*. It is legally possible to marry only one person (though some are now challenging this). But more than that, by promising to forsake all others, they are declaring that they will not let anyone else compete for their romantic and sexual attention.
- The couple also promise to love each other *unconditionally* ('for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health'). How special this is! It means that however difficult the circumstances of life might be, they are going to stand by each other faithfully.
- The couple also promise to love each other *forever* ('till death us do part'). Only death may separate those whom God has joined together. God designed marriage to be something that is permanent and blessed because of this. Jesus warns in Matthew 19:6: 'What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'

Do promises matter?

In recent years, the progressive liberalisation of divorce laws has made it much easier to break the promises of marriage.

Challenges to living God's way

Most recently, in April 2022, the law changed significantly in England and Wales to introduce 'no fault' divorce, which means that a couple can now get divorced solely on the basis that the marriage has broken down, without needing to cite one of the reasons for divorce that were previously required.⁷ It is tempting to think that promises do not matter if the law allows us to break them. But is this true? We need to think further about the nature of a promise.

A promise is made before God, whether a person acknowledges that or not. A broken promise involves sinning against God. 'If a man vows a vow to the Lord... he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth' (Numbers 30:2).

For this reason, it is essential that when someone plans to make a promise, they consider carefully what they are undertaking. Once the promise is made, they must do everything in their power to keep it. A promise, however big or small, should be made with care and kept with care. God requires us to keep a promise even when it hurts (Psalm 15:4).⁸

There is a motto on the coat of arms of the London Stock Exchange: 'My word is my bond.' In other words, 'When I do business with you, I will keep my promise.' A promise allows others to make plans that depend on it. It is this principle that has allowed the London Stock Exchange to flourish over the last 200 years.