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The Deception of the Common-Law Relationship

**FAMILY
RAUD**

Howard and Diane are living together with their two children. "Shacking up," one community member calls it. Marriage doesn't fit their plans just yet.

Eight percent of Canadian families involve common-law relationships, reports the Angus Reid poll of 1994, commissioned for the International Year of the Family. The percentage is much higher in many Native Canadian communities. The birth registry in a recent issue of one Indian newspaper listed 14 births. Seven of these babies had parents with different last names.

Is this open-ended relationship just another acceptable "alternative lifestyle?" Is it, as some say, "marriage the Indian way?"

It certainly is legal. Many families approve of it, giving financial support and social acceptance to the couple. Some common-law unions are stronger than some marriages. Even churches often give acceptance by allowing the traditional white to be worn when the relationship leads to a wedding.

With all this practice, wouldn't you expect a good marriage when the couple finally "ties the knot?"

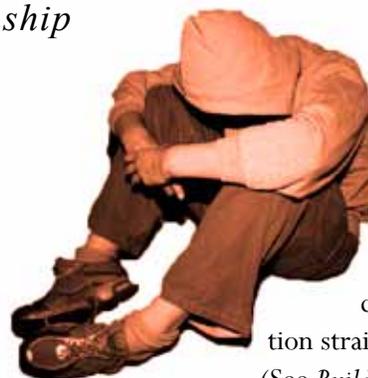
Why then do so many of these marriages fall apart so quickly?

Evidence is mounting that the common-law relationship actually undermines trust, shuts down communication and intimacy, and damages self-esteem. The common-law relationship is a counterfeit. Although it looks like marriage, the common-law relationship at its best is still found lacking. It simply can't produce what a good marriage can.

Check it out. What are the effects of several generations of "make-believe marriages" in Native communities? Are these couples happier than married couples? Are relationships in the extended family better? What about the confused and scrambled ties among the children who are born?

Why aren't these families finding the intimacy they desired? Because intimacy takes time to build. It is built through communication: words, eyes, thoughts, feelings, shared beliefs.

Communication is hard for youth who grow up in alcoholic or abusive homes, where the rules are "Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel." These young people will often jump over the early



stages of communication straight into sex (See *Building Intimacy*

Through Communication inside).

Physical communication through sex feels good. But once there, it is harder to go back and learn the communication skills that lead to true intimacy.

Our Creator's plan for sexual expression is more than a legalistic "Thou shalt not." God knew what would make us happy because he designed us. He created the sex drive to be expressed within the life-long commitment of marriage. Outside of this framework, sexual expression becomes a raging fire that destroys.

The common-law relationship is a shortcut to sex and children. It bypasses the need for communication skills, spiritual intimacy and commitment. If you are considering it for yourself or your children, think twice. Don't be taken in by this family fraud.

Material in this issue was adapted from *Family Fraud* by Peggy Kennedy, National Native Leadership Council '94, Saskatoon SK, with acknowledgements to *The Intimate Deception* by P. Roger Hllerstrom, Multnomah Press, 1989. Used by permission (2009).

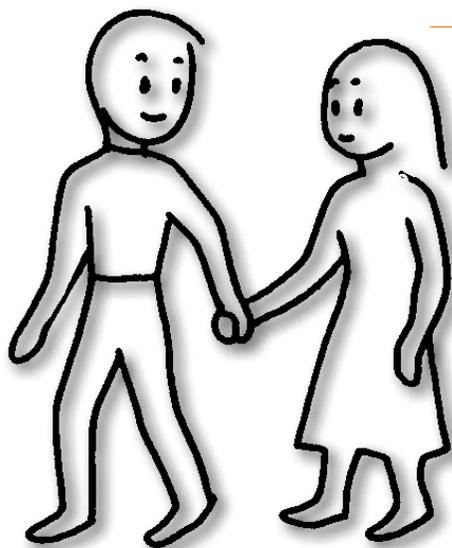


SEX and MARRIAGE

Match these statements on sex and marriage with a Bible passage from the list. Write the matching letter in the blank. If there are several people with Bibles, have a contest. Let everyone read all the verses first. Then, as the leader reads each statement aloud, have a race to find the reference that matches.

- A. Genesis 2:24
- B. Genesis 34:1-31
- C. Genesis 39:7-12
- D. Exodus 22:16
- E. Leviticus 10:13
- F. Proverbs 5:15-20
- G. Song of Solomon 4:1-7
- H. Matthew 5:27, 28
- I. Romans 8:5, 6
- J. 1 Corinthians 6:18

- _____ 1. A man should get all his sexual satisfaction from his wife.
- _____ 2. Being controlled by physical desires brings death, but spiritual desires lead to life and peace.
- _____ 3. God hates homosexual acts.
- _____ 4. Husband and wife become one in marriage.
- _____ 5. If a man has sex with a girl, he should marry her.
- _____ 6. It is good for a wife to display her body to her husband and be admired by him.
- _____ 7. It is wrong even to look with lust at a woman.
- _____ 8. Sex sins can cause anger and violence in the family.



- _____ 9. Sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.
- _____ 10. Some women chase men in order to have sex with them.

ANSWERS
 6 J 10 C
 5 D 6 G 7 H 8 B
 1 F 2 I 3 E 4 A

“HUSBANDS OUGHT TO LOVE THEIR WIVES AS THEIR OWN BODIES...NO ONE EVER HATED HIS OWN BODY, BUT FEEDS AND CARES FOR IT, JUST AS CHRIST DOES THE CHURCH...FOR THIS REASON A MAN WILL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE UNITED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO WILL BECOME ONE FLESH. THIS IS A PROFOUND MYSTERY, BUT I AM TALKING ABOUT CHRIST AND THE CHURCH” (EPHESIANS 5:28-32 NIV).

Let's **LOOK** at the **COMMON-LAW Relationship**

I. Why does the common-law relationship undermine trust?

Trust is based on proof of commitment. A child learns to trust his parents when the parents commit themselves to being there to meet the child's needs. Married couples have made a vow and signed an agreement to stay together, to be there for each other no matter what happens. This agreement is witnessed by the community and extended family. Community involvement strengthens the commitment. Common-law relationships bypass this process and leave a way out of the relationship. The real message seems to be, *"I desire intimacy with you, but there's a limit. I don't want to get so close that I can't escape if you hurt me. I'm not sure I can trust you."*

II. Why does the common-law relationship shut down communication?

Bonding with infants starts with physical contact. With adults it starts with a meeting of minds. Well-bonded relationships stay at the mental and spiritual level for a long time before becoming physical and sexual. In this way intimacy is built. To be intimate is to be vulnerable, emotionally open and trusting.

Sexual intercourse does not require any of this. Couples who begin their relationship in the bedroom have not developed bonding and intimacy through courtship. This lack of intimacy usually leads to resentment: *"I'm only good for one thing: sex."* When conflicts arise, the easiest way out is to deny the conflict by having sex. This "sensation of intimacy" makes it easier to deny the conflict. Unresolved conflict then becomes a barrier to closeness.

III. Why does the common-law relationship damage individual self-esteem?

The basic female need is for security: *"I will give myself to you because in belonging I will be secure."* But the common-law relationship screams back, *"He doesn't love you enough to make a marriage commitment."* She feels betrayed, abandoned, fearful.

The basic male need is for significance: *"I matter to you."* God made the man to fulfill this need by leading the woman who loves and trusts him. Without commitment, jealousies and doubts more quickly arise: *"If she had the choice, she'd prefer somebody else. I don't matter enough for her to marry."*



NOTE: Couples in common-law relationship should not be rushed to the marriage altar. They need to be led through a process of looking at their issues of mistrust, doubt, betrayal, lack of respect and resentment that have prospered in their relationship. They need to retrace their steps back to the missing stages of communication. It will be necessary for them to break off sexual relations while doing this. This process can result in "spiritual virginity" and better foundations for the future.



Today's Native Mother

Dear Moms,

My friend, Emily, was born and raised in a remote area of the North. She went to residential school from ages 6-15. Her parents were both alcoholic. She suffered physical and sexual abuse in the home.

At age 17 she married her first husband. The marriage lasted five years and was an abusive relationship. She remarried. This also was an abusive relationship which lasted five years. She had four children.

After this, she corresponded with a sister who had become a believer in Christ. Emily also became a Christian but she didn't know much about Jesus. By this time she was in another province and going to church. She felt awkward and out of place, but she knew that she wanted to live for Jesus.

Even though she was a Christian, **loneliness was a big problem for her.** She "needed to be needed." Because of her drinking problem, she joined AA. There she met a man who showed interest in her. She thought she could help him. Gradually they began living together.

It was a funny thing, she says now. He'd live with his mom some and with her some. She didn't want a commitment, just company. He didn't physically abuse her, but he'd hurl verbal abuse at her when we was drinking. He was struggling with his own identity too. It hurt her to hear him swear and use God's name in vain.

During this time, she met a Christian couple who became her friends. She went to their Bible

Study. This is when she started "walking the walk." The Christian people gave her quiet love and support. **For the first time in her life she began to feel good about herself.** She began thinking about her lifestyle and knew she wanted to change.

The man would say, "This Jesus thing...how long are you going to live like this?" She'd say, "All my life." She and her friend started praying about how she could tell him to leave. It wouldn't be easy, because he could get angry very quickly. When she was finally able to talk to him, he left peaceable, even before the deadline she had set. He did come back several times to visit his daughter, her fifth child.

Today she is back in her home community. She is starting a home business in Native crafts. She is glad for this opportunity and is doing well. She and her three youngest are going to church regularly.

Her children have suffered. One had a mental breakdown, one keeps things in and drinks some. There has been sexual abuse in their lives. Her youngest daughter asks for her dad. How will Emily provide a male role model for her children?

"I thought love was sex," she says. "I did it all backwards. My ideas were so distorted. Society's ideas are distorted too. God should be in your life. Save yourself for the one you are going to marry. That is what I tell my children now. **My parents didn't tell me. I am still scared of men. I still get lonely. But I am glad that my home is different now. It is only through God's grace that I've managed to come through."**

I'm glad too. My friend's story gives me hope for the thousands of ladies trapped in unhealthy relationships. Jesus Christ can set us all free.

Rejoicing in hope,

Ilva

FAMILY FUN Rainy Day Chest

Fill a chest or trunk with small games and toys. Wrap each one in newspaper comics or other colourful paper. On rainy days open the chest and let each child pick a rainy-day surprise.

Rainy-day surprises don't have to be expensive. They may include items like puzzles, marbles, pickup sticks, bubble-blowing liquid, or materials for making greeting cards.



From *60 One-Minute Memory-Builders* by Dave and Claudia Arp, Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., Brentwood, TN, 1989

Building Intimacy Through

COMMUNICATION



Start Here

CLICHE LEVEL

How are you?
I'm fine.



Eye to Body

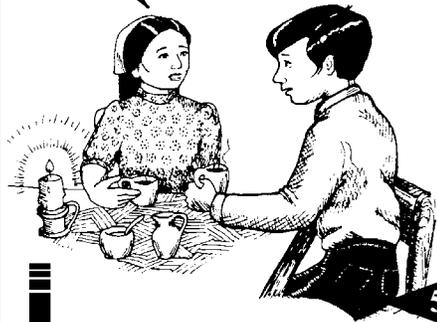
FACTS LEVEL

We killed two
moose today.



DEEPER EMOTIONAL LEVEL

I was abused
when I was young, and
now it's hard for me to
trust men.



FEELINGS LEVEL

I get angry when
you interrupt me.



Eye to Eye

IDEAS LEVEL

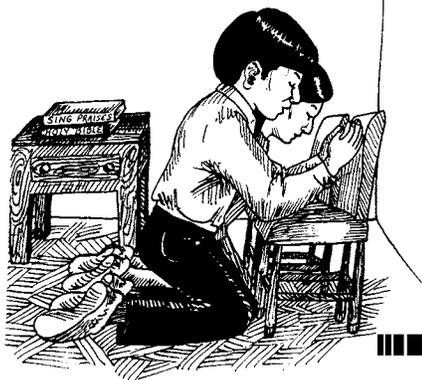
Why do you think
there's so much drinking
among our young people?



Voice to Voice

SPIRITUAL LEVEL

Let's pray about
this need.



PHYSICAL LEVEL

I'm a
one-man
woman

I'm a
one-woman
man



Hand to Hand

SEXUAL LEVEL



Final steps leading to sex

Smile Awhile

A certain man of old, it is said, wrote 3000 wise sayings to help his people get along together. Many of these wise sayings are warm and witty. Can you guess who this wise man is?

- ◇ Beauty in a woman without good judgement is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.
- ◇ Better to eat vegetables with people you love than to eat meat where there is hate.
- ◇ Better to live on the roof than share the house with a nagging wife. A nagging wife is like water going drip-drip-drip on a rainy day.
- ◇ Don't hesitate to discipline a child...it may save his life.
- ◇ Singing to a person who is depressed is like taking off a person's clothes on a cold day or rubbing salt in a wound.
- ◇ Depending on an unreliable person is like trying to chew with a loose tooth.
- ◇ If you answer a silly question, you are just as silly as the person who asked it.
- ◇ Getting involved in an argument that is none of your business is like grabbing a dog by the ears.
- ◇ A friend means well, even when he hurts you. But when an enemy puts his arm around your shoulder - watch out!
- ◇ If someone has a hot temper, let him take the consequences. If you get him out of trouble once, you will have to do it again.
- ◇ Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time.
- ◇ The more easily you get your wealth, the sooner you will loose it. The harder it is to earn, the more you will have.

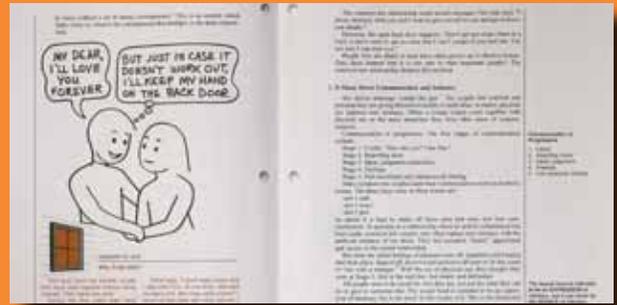
Have you identified the wise man yet? His name is Solomon, and all of these wise sayings can be found in the book of Proverbs. These were taken from the *Today's English Version* of the Bible.



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"Today as never before in our lifetime, the family is under attack from Satan."

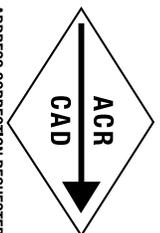


Family Fraud is a booklet written to expose the deception of the common-law relationship and to show why God's ways bring greatest happiness and well-being to families.

You can order your *free* copy of *Family Fraud* from NYM Ministries (contact information below).

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