

# UNITED: Live for Kingdom mission

## 1 Corinthians 7

**MPS: Christians serve the Kingdom faithfully when they live as they are called by God.**

**OBJ: Every person can understand how to live as you are called by three principles.**

**INTRO** In our series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians, we are laboring for one thing; to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Unity fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

**TRANS** 1 Corinthians 7 begins a section of the book where Paul addresses a variety of issues that they were dealing with and questions that had arisen in the church. What we have learned in the first 6 chapters will serve us well to help us with a cross-forged (gospel-centered), word shaped (Biblical) application to remain united with God and together with one another.

**MPS: Christians serve the Kingdom faithfully when they live as they are called by God.**

**In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul addresses confusion about relational status in kingdom living.** Misunderstandings and theological confusion over the body lead to whacky Christian living. This situation is no exception as it states the issue in verse 1. Some were saying, *"It is good for a man not to have sexual relationships with a woman."* Paul responds to help them think about life and their relational status from a Biblical (Word-shaped), gospel-centered (cross-forged) perspective.

**Paul provides a principle that identifies one of God's purposes for marriage.** *"But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband."*(.2) First, he helps us understand that marriage is a God-ordained relationship between a man and a woman. He makes clear that there is no other category, alignment or arrangement for marriage. Then, he gives one of God's primary purposes for marriage. **Sexual intimacy in marriage protects the man and woman against the temptation to immorality by the roles of "wife" and "husband".**

**Paul provides wise counsel to fight temptation.**

*"<sup>3</sup>The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. <sup>4</sup>For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. <sup>5</sup>Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."*

**A husband and wife hold mutual responsibility for each other in marriage.** "Conjugal rights" means 'obligation' or 'debt' and is accompanied by the verb 'give up, yield, render'. The husband and the wife owe an obligation to their spouse to offer themselves to one another for spiritual health. Responsibility is placed on each spouse to offer themselves, not to take from, the other. Accountability is also placed on each person, that their spouse holds authority over how they use their body, which transcends sexual activity. Husbands and wives are responsible to use their bodies to help their spouse, and not use them in a way in which their spouse disagrees. This also means that even when one spouse acts sinfully, the other spouse is not released from their personal responsibility, nor justified in any personal sinful activity. Sin is never atoned or justified by corresponding, responsive sin, but only increased and multiplied. (I.e. one spouse's sin never justifies the other spouse's sin.) **Sexual intimacy is a responsibility and accountability for purity and spiritual health in marriage.**

**Paul offers one exception to this command.** A husband and wife may agree to abstain from sexual intercourse for the purpose of devotion to prayer and spiritual focus. But this should only be for a limited time, and then intentionally return to one another so that Satan cannot exploit the situation. [This makes "Amen" the greatest word in the world, right?] Sex was given by God to serve His purpose in the world. **Christians submit to God through a sexual ethic that serves His eternal purpose and will, as revealed through His Word, so Satan has no opportunity to tempt toward immorality.**

**TRANS** Confusion over marriage culminates in confusion over all relational status in life. Paul provides commands and counsel for all God-honoring, relational statuses, including marriage, singleness, widowed, separation and divorce, and engagement.

**Paul begins with an important concession, in direct response to his instruction on marriage.** (.6-7) “*Concession*” means this does not negate marriage, a creational command, but should be held in equal, yet distinct, honor. He desires that all were as he is, meaning his status of being single. But he acknowledges that singleness is a gift from God. And God gives different gifts in different kinds and measure to each person. Paul encourages any who are single to remain single (.8-9). This is not as an absolute command but in recognition that singleness is good. However, if they cannot remain self-controlled then they should marry. For marriage that guards against sexual immorality is better than singleness that burns with immoral passion. A bloated view of marriage makes singleness an undesirable disease, instead of a gift that is divine. [A high regard for marriage honors singleness as a gift from God.](#)

**Marriage comes with more commands as the most important relationship between two people on earth.** But Paul makes clear that this relationship does not transcend our time on the earth. (7:39-40) Death of a spouse releases a person from the marriage covenant. But while on the earth, the wife is commanded not to separate from nor the husband to divorce his wife. This command is functionally the same for both the husband and wife, since a wife could not divorce her husband, but only separate. Separation and divorce are never desirable, and should never be intentionally pursued. And, scriptural allowance that concedes a divorce only recognizes the hardening of the heart through sin. Christians must understand that Biblical allowance never equals a recommendation. From a Biblical perspective, divorce is never recommended. (Matt 5:32; Matt 9:19)

**Paul explains more scenarios that tend toward divorce.** Neither a man nor woman should divorce a spouse who is an unbeliever, but consent to live with them. A fellow believer is a Biblical qualification for marriage. (2 Cor 6:14). But unbelief is never a Biblical justification for divorce. Paul justifies this command by saying that “*the unbelieving (spouse) is made holy because of (the believing spouse)*”. The full meaning of this phrase is difficult to know. But, the believer who is set apart unto God in salvation carries blessings from God in that relationship that flow out to others. This includes one’s children as well. This doesn’t mean they are saved simply because of the believing spouse. But, a Christian spouse holds a strong influence for godliness and witness for Jesus Christ with the unbelieving spouse. However, if the unbelieving spouse separates, the Christian spouse may, and even should, accept this in order to live in peace. [Christian faithfulness is a greater motivation for godliness than marital happiness.](#)

No two people need to hear this more than those who are, or are about to be, engaged. Paul will deal with engagement in the last part of the chapter.

**APPL** I need to make some applications today, because of our passage; applications we should never forget in the church.

**Singleness, whether for a season or a lifetime, should be honored as a gift from God.** Gifts do not come without hardships or absent of challenges, but this makes them no less gifts. For LifePoint, this means that single adults who seek to follow Jesus faithfully should be honored and recognized for their gift to our family. If you are single, we honor you. If you desire to marry, or if you struggle with passion, then you should marry in order to avoid sexual immorality. But realize that marriage multiplies problems. It doesn’t remove them. [Jesus is Lord over the gift of singleness, just as He is Lord over the covenant of marriage.](#)

**Marriage should be fully submitted to serve Jesus’ Lordship first.** Marriage should strengthen your holiness more and before it serves your happiness. If your marriage is rough right now and you are considering separation or divorce, then please listen clearly. [I am not condemning you for your past. I AM speaking to you right here and now about the reality of your future based on your present obedience.] No matter how bad or wrong you think your marriage is, do not walk out of it. A Christian man does not walk away from his wife. A Christian wife does not walk away from her husband. Christians, both male and female, never create reasons, coerce situations or manipulate circumstances to justify separation and divorce. Men and women who are submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ stay committed to marriage with their spouse. When you stray from your spouse, you stray from Jesus. If you see no way that your marriage can survive, then do not move in any direction until you’ve heard clearly from Jesus. Then, follow Him by faith.

**TRANS** This is heavy teaching. And Paul moves quickly through it with minimal explanation. We need to pause and ask here, “**What is taking place among all these commands, concessions, concerns and counsel?**” He is navigating real-life complexities that confront us with theological seriousness, instead of, as the Corinthians were doing, making theological determinations to define their faith based on personal comforts, preferences, pleasures and conveniences. The main point in all of his application is that relational status does not determine whether or not you can serve God. But there are clear commands and faithful applications in how you must live in order to obey God.

**TRANS** Consider how he unifies his teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:17-24.

### **READ 1 Cor 7:17-24 Live as You Are Called**

*17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. 18 Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. 19 For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. 20 Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. 21 Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. 24 So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

**TRANS** Relational status in the world is only rightly understood when it serves God’s intended purpose. I want to provide a way for us to qualify each little nugget of application that Paul provides in 1 Corinthians 7 with the right perspective with which he unifies his teaching. This brings me back to our main point for today.

**MPS: Christians serve the Kingdom faithfully when they live as they are called by God.**

**TRANS** We sometimes say “You can’t see the forest for the tree(s).” We lose sight of the big picture when we become consumed with details. Life has a larger picture than the important details of daily life. But relational status in life can easily and quickly become an all-consuming detail that blinds and distracts, even deceives. The only way to glorify God is to keep our relational status in life in right perspective of God’s will and purpose for our life. Three principles equip Christians to live out a faithful, gospel application of our identity in Jesus Christ.

**OBJ: Paul provides three principles to live as you are called to faithfully serve God’s Kingdom.**

### **1. Be Available. .17**

**Christians lives available to serve God by leading the life that God has given them.** “Available” is a positional reality of our salvation because it demonstrates Jesus’ Lordship over us. Christians don’t wait until some point in time or accomplishment of life in order to serve God. External circumstances nor socio-economic status, both labels assigned by the world, never determine one’s ability to serve God. God uses those He calls, no matter your status or circumstances. It is no surprise to God what you’ve been through or where you are. He brings glory through redeeming the past, as well as persevering in faithful obedience in the present. No matter what your relational status, accept God’s call “where you are” to live for His glory. **Christians believe that because God has saved them He purposes to use them for His will and work in the world.**

**Serving God’s kingdom is every Christian’s highest aim.** Paul doesn’t reduce the meaning of marriage, but explains all relational status in terms of a gospel-centered, Kingdom-minded purposefulness. Marriage, as with any relational status, is neither your highest honor, achievement, or holiness. Following Christ is not dependent on marriage. Marriage is dependent upon your faithfulness to Christ in all things. **Marriage and family become idolatry when we use God to make marriage and family good, instead of using our marriage and family to make God’s name known.**

**Are you available, living your life now to make Jesus known?**

God never calls people to be able. He is able. His glory is never dependent on our fame or greatness to serve Him. He is great. God calls Christians to be available, to live the life He has given you to serve His Kingdom.

## 2. Be Obedient. .18-23

Paul tells the Corinthians to let nothing get in the way of obedience in serving God. Don't focus on getting cleaned up, washed off, flushed out, marks removed, or outward rituals completed before coming to Jesus. **Christian, let nothing hinder or halt your obedience in serving God.**

**FOCUS on Obedience by Faith.** God knows the sin in your heart and the problems of your life. And, He knows there is nothing you can do about it without Him. He washed you. He'll equip and prepare you. Any sin that lingers He'll lead you through repentance to greater redemption. Any temptation currently knocking, He is speaking louder to show you His provision for your escape. (1 Cor 10:13) **God uses your obedience through faithful service to work out His righteousness in you.**

Getting ahead in life is not a prerequisite to serve God faithfully or better. God doesn't need your accomplishments to accomplish His purposes in you. Being available and obedient to serve God never opposes opportunity. It just doesn't strive toward it without serving God first. Wherever you are, whatever you do, and whomever you are with, serve God right there and right now. If God wants you in a different place, doing something different or with different people, He'll move you. If YOU want God to use you in a different place, way or with different people, then serve faithfully NOW and make your request known to God. He will either change your situation, or he'll change your desire and joys.

- ? **Are you focused on obedience by faith?** What are you "waiting on" or "waiting for" to serve God?
- ? **What consumes your heart and mind to prevent faithful obedience in your life?**

### ILLUS Tim Clark

Tim was born a triple amputee. He worked as an accountant for DST Systems and a co-worker and former diver from the Univ of Nebraska asked if he'd like to swim the 50 free in the KCCC. Tim asked, "Are you crazy? I was born with only one arm and without legs." But he believed God wanted him to do it. So he met at the pool and trained for 4 months. He swam the 50 free in just 43 seconds, placing 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 6 man, able-bodied heat, just three seconds from winning. (His time just happened to be just 4 secs slower than Shaquille Oneal when he took on Michael Phelps.) God then put on his heart to write a book. A book that He helped him write in just 4 months, titled "With God All Things Are Possible!"

God brings His will to fruition FOR your life through faithful obedience IN your life.

## 4. Be Un-divided in devotion to God. .24-40

**Paul returns to this one, defining guide for heart and mind in how we live; Remain as God has called you.** No matter what your condition or status in life, "*Remain with God*" commands a singular focus to avoid disobedience by distraction. It is never a denial of loneliness, hardship, fear or struggles, or some guarantee that they will go away. "*Remain with God*" means a Christian holds a single aim for undivided devotion to God.

**Paul identifies several challenges to devotion and provides guidance for to apply a strong theology for faithful practice.** Paul provides two primary counsels that help us hold an undivided devotion for God. (7:29-31) **First**, an eternal perspective about life holds our devotion for God. Our time in this world is very short, like a mist. (Jms 4:14) Time doesn't afford the luxury to substitute God's purpose for personal agendas. God's sovereignty means every situation, status and circumstance of this life serves eternity. An eternal perspective means we stop asking "**how can God serve me?**" Instead, we ask "**how should I (my marriage, family, job, life) be serving God's purpose where he has placed me in life?**" Whatever is going on in your life right now is no surprise to God and not beyond God. But God cannot deal with it until you put it into His

hands by placing in in His perspective in the way you view your life. [Christians hold an eternal perspective over all of life to bring eternal significance and eternal glory to every moment.](#)

**Second**, do not let anxiety divide your devotion to God. Anxiety is the greatest perpetrator that violates a Christian's eternal perspective. Anxiety always arises with we substitute worldly values for godly wisdom, when we make "good" things to be "gods". And this is nowhere more possible than relational status, marriage and sex.

I offer one illustration that includes multiple examples.

**ILLUS** A friend recounts a story that happened to him after teaching through 1 Cor. He shared that if you burn with passion, you should just get married. Parents came up afterward and confronted him because they encouraged their son/girlfriend to wait until after graduate school, because "a graduate degree was their best hope to get ahead in the world". The friend looked at the son and said "That's fine, as long as they can remain sexually pure." The friend said, "I just wanted to help Chad remain sexually pure." They all got silent and walked away.

The parents pressured the kids toward "good goals" at the expense of godliness. The kids thwarted godly obedience and allowed bitterness towards parents to remain all because they couldn't do what they felt they were supposed to do. Neither could honor God because both had allowed anxieties to consume them.

**Anxieties are inevitable where sin rules or resides in our hearts and minds, and tempts us.** Anxiety's temptation is not sin. But when we allow and tolerate it, it always produces sin. [God consoles our cares and calms our anxieties.](#)

*When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul. Psalm 94:19*

Christ cannot care for us until we cast off our cares and anxieties to put our lives in His hands. Jesus promises to replace our anxieties with His peace when we trust Him. "*Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*" (1 Peter 5:7) [Christ's care motivates a Christian to cast all our anxieties on Him.](#)

**Paul applies a Kingdom focus to Jesus' words when he says,**

*Do not be anxious about your life...*

*But seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matt 6:25(-34)*

**Anxiety steals peace, tolerates sin and divides devotion to Christ.** You don't need a professional to tell you your heart is not fully devoted to God. You have God's own Holy Spirit. Anxiety is not a sign that you're not 'taking care of business', as we excuse and tolerate it today, but that your "business", or usually "busy-ness", is ruling you. [Anxiety adds nothing to your life, and steals the good of everything it infects.](#)

**Anxiety is always a manifestation of two things.** Anxiety is, first, a competing love "whining" in your heart for more love. [How can you know when anxiety exists?](#) Complaining is anxiety in you that's been given a voice by you. Chaos and confusion is a mindset that anxiety produces when it is allowed to rule. Anxiety is also trusting in a false idol that is unable to handle what you are facing, and so it presses you to act in some way to get away. Whining, complaining, and confusion always paints a skewed picture to serve the agenda of whatever is causing your anxiety. [All anxiety sources from fractured loyalty and divided devotion.](#)

Anxiety demands that we repent from placing more trust in what we can accomplish by worry, or taking matters into our own hands, and turn back to Jesus. Anxiety also demands that we identify the root cause of our anxiety, in our thinking and affection, and allow God's Word to transform us from mind and heart to faithfulness in obedience. You can confess your anxiety as many times as you like, but until you root out its source and let God's Word transform to re-train your thinking and affections, you have not fully repented. [Repentance brings freedom by the gospel and transformation to walk in truth by faith accompanied with peace by Holy Spirit.](#)

**[Christians serve the Kingdom faithfully when they live as they are called by God.](#)**