

# Life and contentment

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[ 0 : 00 ] Matthew chapter 19 verses 1 to 12 on page 993. Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so.

[ 1 : 16 ] And I say to you, Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. The disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it's better not to marry.

But he said to them, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men.

And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this, receive it. Our next reading is taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verses 8 to 24, which is on page 1150 of the Bible.

To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

To the married I give this charge, not I, but the Lord. The wife should not separate from her husband. But if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

[ 2 : 35 ] And the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say, I, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Otherwise, your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother or sister is not enslaved.

God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? 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. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision.

[ 3 : 43 ] Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.

Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.

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. You were bought with a price.

Do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

[ 4 : 47 ] The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. Heavenly Father, we praise you very much indeed this morning for your word. And we pray that as we look at 1 Corinthians 7 together, you would indeed revive our souls.

You would make us wise. We would be those who rejoice in your word. And you would enlighten us. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, please would you look at just the last two verses, verses 23 and 24 of that reading, because I think they are the key verses in this passage, and they get to the very heart of the passage for us.

So let me read again. In 1 Corinthians 7, verses 23 and 24, you were bought with a price. Do not become slaves of men.

So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God. My aim this morning is that each one of us who belongs to Jesus Christ would live out the new life that we have in Christ, and we would do so in whatever circumstances of life God has put us in, not forever looking over the shoulder, thinking to ourselves, if only my life was different, if only my circumstances were different.

[ 6 : 18 ] It's so important because each one of us, I imagine we are so quick to believe the lie, aren't we, that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence.

You see, how do you finish this sentence, if only I? As you think about your life, your circumstances, how do you finish that sentence, if only?

If only I was more educated. If only I had more money. If only I was in a different job. If only I had a different upbringing. If only I was married. If only I was married to someone else.

If only I had different gifts. If only I had a different personality. If only I lived somewhere else. If only my life circumstances were different. The list is endless, isn't it? If only.

If only life had not turned out the way it's turned out. If only I hadn't turned out the way I had turned out. 1 Corinthians chapter 7 is a huge lesson in contentment.

[ 7 : 18 ] But what we're going to see is not simply contentment for the sake of contentment. But contentment for a purpose. So that we might get on with serving Jesus.

And living the life that God has given us to live. And I hope very much that if you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian. If you're looking in on the Christian faith.

Then I think what we're going to see this morning. I hope you're going to see that it's wonderfully attractive. That it is actually the key of getting off the treadmill of if only. Now I need to apologize for the sermon title I think on the program card.

Which reads marriage and divorce. A far better title is simply life and contentment. Because yes Paul picks up on where we were last week. He does talk about marriage, singleness and divorce and so on.

He's continuing to pick up on the questions which the Corinthians have asked him. Verse 1. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote. So in verses 8 and 9 as we just had the reading.

[ 8 : 22 ] He speaks to the unmarried. In verses 10 and 11 to the married. In verses 12 to 16 to those who are married to unbelievers. But then in verses 17 to 24.

He goes on to talk about a big principle. A big principle for life in general. For all of us regardless of whether we are married or unmarried or so on.

And I want to start first of all this morning with a big principle. And then go back to see how that principle applies in the three areas of life that Paul talks about.

So first of all the big principle. Verses 17 to 24. It is very simple. It is remain as you are. Remain as you are. Verse 17.

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him. And to which God has called him. It is actually a principle which runs throughout this whole chapter.

[ 9 : 22 ] Remain. It is always helpful isn't it when you are looking at a Bible passage. To see what the repeated words are. To see what the repeated phrases are. And the most often repeated word

in this chapter is remain.

So it is there in verse 8. It is good for them to remain single. Verse 11. But if she does she should remain unmarried.

Verse 20. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Verse 24. So brothers in whatever condition each was called. There let him remain with God.

Verse 26. It is good for a person to remain as he is. Verse 40. In my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is.

That is the main point. The main application of this whole chapter. Stop looking over your shoulder. As if the grass is always greener somewhere else.

[10:24] Well why? And here I think is the thing which completely goes against every grain in our culture. The reason is because our circumstances do not determine our ability to honor and serve God.

Let me say that again. Our circumstances do not determine our ability to honor and serve God. The context of this whole section is Paul's teaching on who we are if we have now put our trust in Jesus. Just look back to chapter 6 verse 11. And such was some of you. But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And by the spirit of our God. Or chapter 6 verse 19. Or do you not know. That your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you.

Whom you have from God. You are not your own. For you are bought with a price. That is repeated in verse 23 of chapter 7. You are bought with a price.

[11:41] It's vital that we remember. If we put our trust in Jesus Christ. That our fundamental identity as Christians. flows precisely out of who we now are in Jesus.

And what Jesus has done for us. We so easily define ourselves, don't we, in other ways. Whether we are married. Or single. Divorced.

Widowed. Straight. Homosexual. Parents. Childless. Or by the job we do. Or by countless other things. Now all of those things are significant.

But we must not let them determine. Our fundamental sense of who we are. If we are followers of Jesus Christ. We are first and foremost.

Those who belong to Jesus. And have been saved by Jesus. Through his death on the cross. Purchased. At a very great price. Such that we now belong to him. Such that we are to serve him.

[12:39] That is the very core. Of who we now are. In fact it's how 1 Corinthians began. Do you remember? Why don't you just turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 2.

Do you remember how 1 Corinthians started? Chapter 1 verse 2. To the church of God that is in Corinth.

To those sanctified in Christ Jesus. Called to be saints. Generally we said the word sanctified means set apart to serve.

Similarly the word saints. One set apart to serve. To serve Jesus. When we put our trust in Jesus. It's not as if Jesus joins my team.

To help me achieve. The ambitions which I've always had. For my life. Jesus there to serve me. No. It is that I.

[13:40] Having been bought at a great price. Am now to serve him. That is to be the focus of my life. In everything that I do. And am.

It's the heartbeat of 1 Corinthians. You're not saved to serve yourself. You are saved. To serve Jesus Christ. Christ. As we've seen throughout this letter.

God wants us not only to believe. In Christ crucified. But then for our lives to be shaped. By Christ crucified. Here in chapter 7. In the context of marriage.

Divorce. And singleness. It's about valuing. The life that we have now. In Christ. And therefore. Verse 17 of chapter 7.

Living the life. The Lord. Has assigned us. Perhaps an illustration. From a children's party. Will help. It's time for past the parcel.

[14:36] Each layer. Has been beautifully. And meticulously wrapped. Painstakingly so. With a presence. In each layer. So that each child. Goes away.

With a present. It's a politically correct version. Of past the parcel. Prizes for everyone. No one's going to get left out. But by the end of the game. There is complete carnage. Of course.

Because Jake. Has opened his present. And doesn't like it. He is looking over his shoulder. To see what Sam's got. And would much rather. The present that Sam. Has ended up with. Meanwhile. Lily. Is almost in tears. Because she would rather. Have had soap his present. Over here. In fact. No one's happy. Because everyone. Is looking over their shoulder. Longing for everyone else's present.

At which point. The wise party host. Moves on to the next game. The point. Verse 17. Only let each person. Lead the life.

[15:32] The Lord has assigned. To them. In other words. Our response. You see. Not to think. If only I had something different. But actually. To live.

The life. That God. Has given me. That's why. In verses 18 to 21. Paul addresses. The two big social divisions. In first century.

Roman society. In verses 18 and 19. The division. First of all. Between Jew. And Gentile. Let me read them. 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.

For neither. Circumcision. Counts for anything. Nor uncircumcision. But keeping. The commandments. Of God. Roman culture.

[16:26] Look down. On. Jewish culture. For those. Who had become. Christians. From Jewish. Backgrounds. It seems. As if. Some were seeking. To remove. The marks.

Of their circumcision. Apparently. It was possible. But we won't go into. The details of that. Now. But to do so. In order to climb. The social ladder. To advance.

Their social. Mobility. But what matters. Far more. Says Paul. Verse 19. Is keeping. The commandments. Of God. Serving.

Jesus. And then. Verses 20. 21. The division. Between slave. And free. Each one. Should remain. In the condition. In which he was called. Were you a slave.

When called. Do not be concerned. About it. But if you can. Gain your freedom. Avail yourself. Of the opportunity. For he was called. For he who was called. In the Lord.

[17:19] As a slave. Is a freedman. Of the Lord. Likewise. He who was free. When called. Is a slave. Of Christ. Now.

We mustn't. Misunderstand. Paul. As if he somehow. Approves. Of slavery. No. Verse 21. He says. If you can gain your freedom. Then gain your freedom. But don't be concerned. About it. As if you are.

A second class. Christian. If you're a slave. As if your. Christian service. And Christian ministry. As a slave. Is in some way. Second rate. To the slave.

Paul says. Verse 22. You're free. In Christ. You belong to the Lord. But to the free person. He says. You are to regard yourself. As a slave.

Of Christ. And at his. Disposal. See how wonderfully. Liberating that is. Many Christians.

[18:15] In India. Are amongst. The very poorest. Of society. At the very. The very lowest. Of the low. So to speak. Does that diminish. Their ability.

To serve the Lord Jesus. In their context. Does that mean. Their Christian service. And Christian ministry. Is second rate. Nothing of the sort. What about the Christian.

In the UK. Working on the supermarket. Till. Or as a delivery driver. Or in a call center. Does their lowly job. Diminish. Their ability. To serve Jesus.

Are. Is their Christian life. In some way. Second rate. As a result. Not at all. Because what really. Counts in life. Verse 19. Is keeping the commandments.

Of God. Verse 22. Being a slave. Of Christ. It's very subversive. Isn't it?

[19:12] In our upwardly. Mobile. Culture. Because of course. From a worldly point of view. We view the circumstances. In which we. Find ourselves.

We regard them. Don't we. The circumstances. Of life. As very important. As very important.

Indeed. We instinctively. Have a scale. In our minds. Which tells us. It's better to be a doctor.

Than a road sweeper. It's better to be a millionaire. Than on the minimum wage. It's better to be. In a five bedroom house. Than it is. In a bed sit.

It's better to be married. Than unmarried. And as a result. Life can so easily. Become an endless quest. Chasing after these things. Trying to better ourselves.

And change our circumstances. But God wants us to know this morning. It is spiritually irrelevant. Whether we are rich. Or poor.

[ 20 : 09 ] Whether we have a high flying job. Or a lowly job. Blue collar. Or white collar. Educated. Or uneducated. None of these things.

Determine our ability. To live the Christian life. And to get on. With serving. The Lord Jesus. If you are a follower of Jesus. Your energies. Should not be poured into seeking. To change your life situation. But instead. To live for Jesus. And serve Jesus. With the life. That he has given you. Today. Not always looking over the hill.

Hoping that something else. Will come along. But investing. Your energies. In serving Jesus. With the life he has given you. Today. So verse 23.

Don't become slaves of men. To the expectations. Of other people. So often. I think that can. We can fear. Can't we? Missing out. You know.

[ 21 : 05 ] What if I don't get that promotion? What if I don't get all those. Exam results. Well yes. You may miss out. On what other people. Regard. As important. As important. As important.

But you won't be missing out. On the really big thing in life. Which is serving. The Lord Jesus. Perhaps you're here this morning.

And you're looking for guidance. About a new job. Well here it is. Yes you're free. You're free to apply for a different job. Just as the slave is free.

To get their freedom. If the opportunity comes. But the criteria. For whether or not you take it. Should not be your career development. Or your sense of personal fulfillment.

But whether it's going to help you. To serve Jesus. Better. Men. If it means you have less time. To lead your family. Don't take it.

[ 22 : 03 ] Everyone. If we have less time. And fewer opportunities. To serve the Lord Jesus. And to promote the gospel. Don't take it. What matters is serving Jesus.

Keeping the commandments. Of God. And yes there are those. Wonderfully in the church family. Who have said no. To the assumption. That they will simply keep on progressing.

Up the career ladder. They're not slaves. To the expectations of others. It is wonderfully. Liberating. Or perhaps you're looking for guidance.

As a parent. What are we going to encourage our children. To see. As the most important thing. In life. Parents. We constantly fret. Don't we.

About our children. About them getting left behind. Are they sleeping through the night. When they're two weeks old. Have they got grade eight piano. By the time they're six. Have they got all. A star.

[ 23 : 03 ] GCSE. So are they going to go to the right university. It is endless. Instead. Let's make sure we have bigger. Ambitions. More important. Ambitions.

For our children. Not to be worldly. And obsess about status. And position. But to focus on serving the Lord Jesus.

In whatever area of life. He has placed them in. And in whatever circumstances. He has placed them in. Again wonderfully. Liberating. From the tyranny.

Of the expectation. Of others. Or perhaps you're looking for guidance. About who to go out with. Or who to get married to. Well I hope we can see. The most important question.

We honestly. Need to ask ourselves. Is whether that other person. Will help you. To serve. The Lord Jesus. And there'll be a whole range. Of other applications. Of this principle.

[ 23 : 59 ] Which we can discuss. Over coffee. So that's the big principle. This morning. Verses 17 to 24. It is to remain. What we're going to do now. Is to go back in the passage.

And look at those three. Specific examples. One of the lies. I think we're constantly being fed. By the glossy magazines. And films. And television programs. Is that life is all about. Finding that special person.

He gets the girl. She gets the boy. They live happily ever after. Or there's the interview. In hello magazine. Or the. You know. The Saturday section. The newspaper. Depending on whatever it is. You read. Which shows them living.

The perfect life. And we so easily. Think to ourselves. Don't we? Well. Unless I have that special relationship. Unless I have. The perfect life. Then actually. My life will always be.

Second best. But actually. One Corinthians 7. Reminds us. That if we're following. Jesus Christ. Then. In a very real sense. We have that special relationship.

[ 24 : 54 ] Already. In Jesus. He is the key. To life. And it's our relationship. With Jesus. That enables us. Then to live out. The circumstances of life.

That God has given us. And even to do so. In circumstances. Which. In many senses. May seem very. Unideal. To us. So first of all.

To the unmarried. Verses 8 and 9. To the unmarried. And the widows. I say. That it's good for them. To remain single. As I am. But if they cannot.

Exercise self-control. They should marry. For it's better to marry. Than to burn. With passion. Notice our big principle. Is there. Verse 8. It's good to remain single.

But it's also a matter. Of Christian freedom. We'll see much more. Of this next week. How Paul will say. To those who are single. They do well. To those who are married. They do well. As well.

[ 25 : 51 ] You might say. How can anyone. Live. As a single person. In a culture. Which shouts at us. That unless you have. That special person. In your life. Then actually.

Life's always going to be. Second best. Christ. Well precisely. Because of who we are. In Christ. And what we have. In Christ. We've been bought.

At a price. He is personally. Committed to us. His Holy Spirit. Lives in us. He is our true security. He is the key. To being fruitful. And useful.

In life. In other words. We mustn't deceive ourselves. About marriage. The sort of Bridget Jane syndrome. You know. As if marriage will solve all our problems. And meet all our needs.

A true contentment. True purpose. Is to be found. Only in Jesus. As we serve him. It is not something. Which another person. A husband.

[ 26 : 48 ] Or wife. Can provide. Many in this room. Who are married. Will testify. To that. Come back next week. And we'll see the gospel reason.

Why it's good to remain single. Secondly. To the married. Verses 10 and 11. To the married. I give this charge. Not I. But the Lord.

The wife should not separate from her husband. But if she does. She should remain unmarried. Or else be reconciled to her husband. And the husband. Should not divorce. His wife.

Notice in verse 10. Paul says. Not I. But the Lord. Because this is a situation. Which the Lord Jesus. Spoke directly about. Yes. There are very rare circumstances.

In which divorce is permitted. We had. That first reading this morning. Didn't we. From Matthew. Chapter 19. Where Jesus speaks. About sexual immorality. Where the marriage covenant. Has clearly.

[ 27 : 43 ] Been broken. It's always a great sadness. And Paul. Picks that up. In verse 11. And recognizes. Such exceptional.

Situations. But notice too. Verse 11. That our big principle. Is also there. That marriage. Is for life. Unless. Separation. Has been for the exceptional.

Reason. Jesus spoke about. Then she should remain. Unmarried. Or be reconciled. It's so different. Isn't it. From what the secular. Counselor.

Will say. Which is. No doubt. That every marriage. Has a limited. Shelf life. And notice too. That even in the case. Of an exceptional.

Situation. Such as adultery. That needn't. Necessarily. Lead to divorce. Although. It's may. But you say. How could you possibly. Live in a marriage.

[ 28 : 38 ] Like that. How can you. Rekindle. The warmth. And love. And tenderness. In a marriage. Which has gone. So cold. Well.

It is by considering. The death. Of the Lord Jesus. On the cross. And. His great. Sacrificial love. For us. The gospel. You see. Is a great help for us.

As we keep saying. Throughout 1 Corinthians. Not just. Believing. In the death. Of Jesus Christ. At the beginning. Of the Christian life. But then the whole. Of our lives. Being shaped. By the cross.

Thereafter. Jesus who died for us. While we are still sinners. We can pray. Can't we. That he would enable us. To show that same. Unconditional love. To our spouses.

Thirdly. To those. Married. To unbelievers. And the situation here. Is where two people. Are married. One of them. Becomes a Christian. And. I'm just.

[ 29 : 37 ] Looking at this. Earlier on. In the week. It seems to me. That this is a great.

Encouragement. There are. A number of us. In the church family. In this situation. And these verses. I think. Should be a great.

Encouragement. To us. Have a look. At verses 12. And 13. To the rest. I say. I not the Lord. That if any brother. Has a wife. Who is an unbeliever.

And she consents. To live with him. He should not divorce her. If any woman. Has a husband. Who is an unbeliever. And he consents. To live with her. She should not divorce him.

Now verse 12. Paul says. I not the Lord. Which of course. Does not mean. That what Paul is writing. Is somehow. Less authoritative. Than what the Lord Jesus. Said.

And that we're sort of free. To take it or leave it. In terms of. What Paul says here. No. Paul speaks here. As elsewhere. With the full authority. Of an apostle.

[ 30 : 32 ] Of the Lord Jesus. But he's speaking. About something. Which Jesus himself. Did not address. In his earthly ministry. Notice.

The big principle. Is there again. In verses 12 and 13. Don't divorce. Your unbelieving. Spouse. It may be. That some of the Christians. In Corinth. Thought perhaps. They should leave their marriage.

Having become Christians. Because that in some way. They would be spiritually. Defiled. Through their union. With an unbeliever. Perhaps. They thought. They could serve Jesus.

More effectively. If they left. Their spouse. Well Paul replies. Doesn't he. With words. Of great. Reassurance. In verse 14. For the unbelieving husband.

Is made holy. Because of his wife. And the unbelieving wife. Is made holy. Because of her husband. Otherwise. Your children. Would be unclean. But as it is. They are holy.

[ 31 : 28 ] Far from being. Defiled. By being married. To an unbeliever. Actually. Quite the opposite. Is the case. The unbeliever. Is made holy. Now clearly.

That doesn't mean. They will automatically. Be saved. As Paul says. Verse 16. You simply don't know. Whether or not. They will be. They may be. They may not be.

But they are holy. Set apart. To hear. And possibly. Receive. The gospel. In a way. That wouldn't. Be the case. If they were not married. To someone. Who was a Christian.

Now. At the risk. Of causing great embarrassment. John and Helen Reese. Are marvelous examples. Of this. So. John and Helen. Were married. Helen became a Christian. And later on. John became a Christian. It's a wonderful story. Do ask them about it. Afterwards. Over coffee. God's kindness. You see. Likewise. The children.

[ 32 : 24 ] Of such marriages. Are to be regarded. As holy. So. Don't think. That somehow. If you're in a marriage. Like this. If you're a Christian believer. If you're married.

To an unbeliever. Don't think. That you are. In some way. A second class Christian. Don't think. That in some way. Your Christian service. And your Christian ministry. Is second class.

No. Verse 17. Live out the life. God has given you. Yes. Verse 15. If your unbelieving spouse. Wants a divorce. Then you are not enslaved.

I take it. That means. You are free to divorce. And free to remarry. Otherwise. Says Paul. Stick with it. And Paul's teaching here. It reflects.

Doesn't it. Something. Yes. Of the uncertainty. But also. The heartache. And I guess. The sacrifice. That actually. Sticking with it. May. Involve. And when we ask.

[ 33 : 21 ] The question. Well. What's going to enable. Someone to stick with it. To stick with. Possibly. A difficult marriage. And to do so. With the possible. Though by no means.

Certain. End result. That they may become a Christian. But they may not. What's going to. Enable someone. To stick with a marriage like that. Well. Surely again.

It is only. The gospel. It is Christ's. Great love. For us. That once we were still. That when we were still sinners. He died for us.

His unconditional. Love. For sinful people. And the assurance. That his spirit lives in us. That his spirit will enable us. To get on.

And live the life. That God. Has given us. To live. Even though actually. It may be very different. From the kind of life. That we were. Expecting.

[ 34 : 16 ] So one big principle. Three specific. Examples.