

# God's Word to Singles

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Today's scripture reading is taken from 1 Corinthians 7, verses 17-38. 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. 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 shall 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 freed man 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.

[ 1 : 09 ] Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present, distress it is good for a person to remain as he is.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none.

And those who mourn as though they were not mourning. And those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as though they had no goods. And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

For the present form of this world is passing away. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord. How to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things.

[ 2 : 14 ] How to please his wife and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord. How to be holy in body and spirit.

But the married woman is anxious about worldly things. How to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit. Not to lay any restraint upon you. But to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed. If his passions are strong. And it has to be. Let him do as he wishes. Let them marry.

It is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart. But whoever is firmly established in his heart. Being under no necessity. But having his desire under control. And has determined this in his heart.

To keep her as his betrothed. He will do well. So then. He who marries his betrothed does well. And he who refrains from marriage will do even better. Aaron's a scripture reading.

[ 3 : 13 ] Amen. Thank you very much Josh. For reading God's word. To us this morning. This morning we are concluding our five part. Sermon series titled God's word.

To the family. This final sermon is titled God's word. To singles. But this sermon is different from the previous four.

Each of the previous four sermons. Was directed to. A specific group. Of people.

A specific member of the family. Is the way I should say it. We started out with God's word. To wives. Which is specifically. Submit to your husbands.

And then God's word to husbands. Specifically. Love your wives. And then God's word to children. [ 4 : 10 ] Specifically. Obey your parents. And last week we. Heard the sermon. God's word to fathers. Which is. Raise your children in the Lord.

God's word. But this morning as we come to this. Particular sermon. God's word to singles. There is no specific.

Word. In scripture. That's directed to singles. As a group. And I think the reason for that. Is that singles. Are a diverse group.

Singles are a broad. Group. Some people are single. Because they have never been married. Some people are single. Because they. Have been married.

But are divorced. Or. Their spouse has passed. And then among the categories. Of singles. We have. Some who are older. We have some who are younger.

[ 5 : 06 ] We have some who. Have children. Some don't. And among those who have children. Some have minor children. And some have adult children. Some have a combination.

And all of these are factors. For singles to consider. In regard to. Their singleness. And I think. This is why.

Because singles are such a broad. And diverse group. There is no. Specific. Word in scripture. That we can say. Is to singles. In the same way.

There's a word to. Wives. And husbands. And children. And fathers. And so. Since there is no specific word. To. Singles. What I've sought to do.

In crafting. A word. To singles. Is to draw broadly. From scripture. And to summarize. God's word. To singles. Which is this.

[ 6 : 03 ] Maximize. Your singleness. For the glory of God. Who are what you do. Who are what you do. Who are what you do. it in this way, is that the vast majority of people who are single will not always be single.

For the vast majority of singles, the vast majority of believers in particular, they won't remain single. Singleness is really a season which they are passing through. And therefore every person, every believer who is single, needs to maximize their singleness.

For the time that they are single, for the glory of God. That is what they should seek to do. But even though there is no specific word to singles from scripture, there is one topic around which many singles have common questions and a common interest.

And that's the topic of marriage. And connected to the topic of marriage is the topic of relationships. And there are many questions that those who are single have around this area of marriage.

Some of the questions that some singles have about marriage is the uncertainty of marriage.

Marriage. For example, if you're single this morning, perhaps you might be wondering, will I ever get married?

[ 7 : 44 ] Or if you're a single lady, you might be wondering, if I do get married, will I get married in time for me to have children?

And if you're divorced or riddled, having been married, perhaps you are considering, should I remarry? Or should I remain single?

In addition to all of that, one of the other areas of concern for singles or where they have questions is about conduct in relationships between the opposite sex.

what is appropriate beyond holding hands. I trust by now, if you haven't already seen, you can see why there is no specific word to singles as a group because they are so diverse and they find themselves in different circumstances.

Now, singles, what I will say to you from the outset, and some of you who are tracking with me are probably thinking, that's a lot of ground to try to cover in a sermon.

[ 9 : 06 ] And my aim is not to necessarily answer every single question that you have. That is not my aim at all. I don't promise that. But what I do promise is this.

I promise you that if you will hear and heed this sermon this morning, any questions that linger in your heart after this sermon, by the grace of God, you will be able to work through and come to answers based on God's word.

And so that's the promise this morning. The promise is, if you will hear and heed this sermon, any questions that you might have that I don't answer, you would be in a position to get before the Lord and to seek answers to those questions in prayer and from his word, and you will find answers to many of those remaining questions.

Before we hear God's word, let's take a moment and pray. Father, we thank you this morning for this privilege that we have to be able to gather.

We're able to gather and sing and pray to memorize scripture together and now to sit under the proclamation of your word. Lord, you have brought us all to this place, even though we have made, humanly speaking, decisions to come.

[10:43] Would you open our hearts and our minds to hear what you would say to us. Lord, may the posture of all of our hearts, especially those who are single, be mass to speak.

Your servant is listening. God, help us to posture ourselves to hear what you would say to us. And then, Lord, would you grant us grace to heed all that you say to us.

We ask that you would do this now. In Jesus' name, amen. From the outset, let me say that the target audience for this sermon is those who are believers and those who are 18 years and older. So, Leila, you can do this. Just teasing you. Keep your ears open. It's... You will benefit by hearing much of this so early.

And I really do think we need to allow our young people to hear what's going to be shared this morning much earlier than they tend to either hear it or stumble upon it as they go through life.

[12:03] In our remaining time, as we consider what it looks like, singles, to maximize your singleness for the glory of God, I want to invite you to prayerfully consider three realities that I will seek to draw from chapter 7 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and I pray that as you consider these realities, the Lord will show you how you are able to maximize your singleness for His glory.

First, consider the reality of God's providence in your life. And by God's providence, I mean God's work in your life that has ultimately brought you to the place where you find yourself currently.

It's the providential dealings of God that are more real in your life than the decisions that you have made to bring your life to where you find yourself in this place of singleness.

For this first point, I want us to consider verses 17 to 28, but first, what I want to do is I want to set the context for verses 17 to 28.

in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is answering questions that were sent to him by the Corinthian church around the topic of marriage.

[14:02] And in verses 1 to 16, the Apostle Paul addresses the importance of a healthy marriage. And he addresses husbands and wives, how they are to be mutually submitted to each other in the area of sexual relations.

And how, in doing so, it's a protection against sexual immorality. And then Paul goes on to address difficult marriages.

There were wives in the Corinthian church who wanted to divorce their husbands, and there were husbands who wanted to divorce their wives.

There were wives who wanted to be separate from their husbands and not engage in sexual relations with them, and even depart from some of them.

And those who wanted to leave those who were believing wives, the Apostle Paul or believing spouses, the Apostle Paul was saying to them, well, you have no grounds to separate yourselves in your marriage.

[15:21] Paul reminded them of what the Lord's command was. And then in verses 12 to 16, he addresses the situation of a believer who is living with an unbelieving spouse who he wants to live with, but this unbelieving spouse doesn't want to live with a believing spouse, and the unbelieving spouse departs.

And Paul says to the believing spouse in such a situation, if the unbelieving spouse separates, well, you're not enslaved, meaning you are free from that departing spouse.

spouse. And therefore, what we find before we come to the text that we are considering this morning, beginning in verse 17, is the immediate context is the Apostle Paul is addressing believers who find themselves in undesirable and difficult marital situations.

They find themselves in situations they would rather not be in. And those who believe as Paul is saying to them, you must be faithful to your marriage, and you must be obedient to the Lord.

But in these difficult situations, how does the Apostle Paul then go on to address them in terms of how they should relate in these difficult relationships they find themselves in?

[17:00] Well, starting in verse 17, the Apostle Paul addresses them in a principled manner by directing their attention away from their difficult, problematic relationships, and instead calling them to focus on leading the life that God has called them to.

That's what he does. He doesn't dwell with them in the misery of their marriages, and maybe try to talk to them about how to change this or how to change that. He doesn't go there.

What he does is he directs their attention away from those difficulties, and he says to them, you must lead the life that God has called you to. That must be your focus.

Look at how he says that in verse 17. Only let each person lead the life that God has assigned to him and to which God has called him.

This is my rule in all the churches. And then beginning in verses 18 to 24, the Apostle Paul illustrates this point by using two providential conditions in which people found themselves which they really had no control over.

[18:16] people. And the two conditions are being circumcised and being a slave. People didn't choose to be circumcised. People don't choose to be a slave.

if you were born to Jewish parents or then on the eighth day you would be circumcised and that choice was made for you whether if you would have made it for yourself if you could have, it was made for you.

circumcision. And depending on which setting that you found yourself in it would be circumcision in that day would have been an issue because in the Corinthian church there were Jews and there were Gentiles.

There were Gentiles who were not circumcised. It would not have been typical for them to be circumcised. and sometimes both Jews and Gentiles in the Corinthian church would have found themselves in situations where their circumcision or their lack of circumcision was such a barrier that it became an issue so much so that they would rather that they weren't circumcised if they were a Jew or that they were circumcised if they were a Gentile.

And what does the Apostle Paul say to them? He tells them don't worry about it. He says don't worry about it either way. Whether you're circumcised or you're uncircumcised don't worry about it because it really doesn't matter.

[19:48] He says to them for circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but keeping the commandments of God.

In other words what he says to them is whether you're circumcised or not doesn't matter. What matters is serving the Lord and obeying him. And then the second illustration about slavery which he covers in verses 21 to 23 he is addressing a group of people in the Corinthian church.

This is one of the beautiful things about the church of God is that there were people from all strata and all circumstances there were slaves in the church and they would have been on the bottom rung of society.

And so in the Corinthian church you could imagine how this issue of slavery would be rising where those who were slaves would rather that they weren't slaves and those who were not slaves would feel superior that they weren't slaves.

And what does Paul say to them? He says to them, he says you shouldn't, to the one who is a slave, he says don't worry about it. Don't worry about it because you belong to the Lord and you're the Lord's freed person.

[21:06] however you can gain your freedom, he says avail yourself of it. And so what Paul is doing is Paul is directly and indirectly speaking to the Corinthian church and helping them to see that their situation that they may find themselves in, whether it is in a difficult marriage, whether it is in this religious circumstance of being circumcised or uncircumcised, which could be a barrier at times, whether it's being a slave or feeling superior because you're not a slave, he says none of that really should preoccupy your life.

Instead, what you should be more concerned about is that you belong to the Lord and he calls you to live a life that isn't defined by the preoccupation of the status that you have, but instead it is defined by a desire to live the life that he has called you to.

That's Paul's point. That's why he uses these two illustrations of these two undesirable circumstances and how what is important is that we focus on what the Lord has called us to be and to do in whatever condition we find ourselves in.

Now notice that starting in verse 25, Paul directly addresses singles who were engaged to be married. And he begins by saying that he had no command from the Lord in what he was going to be saying to these singles.

And some people are tripped up by that but there's no need to be tripped up by that. All Paul is saying is this. He's not saying you're free to discount what I'm saying because it's not a command

from the Lord. What he's saying is the Lord in his ministry did not deal with this particular topic that I'm addressing now and that's singles and their decision to marry or not marry.

[ 23 : 20 ] The Lord didn't deal with that so I have no command from the Lord. But he says I'm speaking as one who has received God's mercy. As one who has been counted faithful and trustworthy and there he's pointing to his apostleship.

And he's saying on that basis you should hear the judgment that I'm going to give. And Paul is sharing this under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Now Paul in verse 26 or starting in verse 26 we're able to tell that the counsel that Paul is given or the counsel he is giving to these singles in the Corinthian church is being tempered by a circumstance which he refers to as the current distress.

Some situation of distress, difficulty, people have speculated on what it is, we don't know what it is, but whatever it is we know that it was serious enough to cause the apostle Paul to take it into account when he was addressing these singles.

Let's look at what he says again starting in verse 25. Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

[ 24 : 45 ] I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife?

Do not seek a wife. Again, Paul is calling the Corinthians to embrace the providential condition in which they find themselves, whether they are married or whether they are unmarried.

But he goes on to say to them in verse 28, if you go ahead and get married, you haven't sinned. It's not a sinful thing to go and get married. And so I think it's important to try to digest singles, what the apostle Paul is saying and what I'm calling you to prayerfully consider in this season of singleness in which you find yourself.

are you seeing your singleness as a providential condition that the Lord has you in? Or are you seeing it as some undesirable, difficult circumstance that you're in and that you just can't wait to get out of?

[ 26 : 16 ] are you seeing it as God's providential good for you in this time of your life? Are you seeing it and asking yourself how best you are able to serve the Lord in your singleness rather than being preoccupied with the fact that you are single?

Are you singleness? Echoing the words of the apostle Paul, I would say to you in your singleness do not be concerned about it.

Don't be concerned over being married or not being married. Instead, concern yourself with living and leading the life that God has called you to in this season of singleness.

And obviously this doesn't mean that you to view singleness as a permanent condition because again for most single people that's not the case. And even if you look at the point that Paul makes in verse 21 to slaves when he says to them, he says don't be concerned about your slavery but if you can gain your freedom go ahead and gain your freedom.

The same would be true to someone who is leading the life that God has called them to as a single person focus on serving the Lord in this season of singleness and not being preoccupied with marriage if marriage comes embrace marriage.

[ 27 : 43 ] But it isn't something to be preoccupied and work yourself up concerning. I think it's important to see for those of us who are married that Paul is not just addressing those who are single.

those of us who are married have to also consider God's providence in our marriage in our married condition and we also need to lead the life that God has called us to in marriage and this could be hard for those who are in difficult marriages.

Nonetheless God calls us to embrace the condition the circumstance in which we providentially find ourselves and we are to be preoccupied with leading the life that God has called us to live before him seeking to please him seeking to glorify him rather than being preoccupied with our condition. Instead we are to preoccupy ourselves with serving him and seeking to glorify him. So whether our circumstance is being single or being married it is God's providence to us we need to embrace it we need to seek to serve him in it.

I know I've already touched on it in passing but I think it would be negligent of me if I did not acknowledge this morning that one of the realities of being single is generally it's not a desired condition marriage is the desired condition generally and I think the reality about that is that's the

way God made us God made us for relationships and marriage is the highest form of intimacy and closeness of relationship that we can enjoy with another person the joining of a man and a woman in marriage is the most intimate relationship that we can have and that's what God has wired us for and so we would generally see that being single is not a desirable condition and again certainly in the case of single women as they are getting older and they are aware that their biological clocks are ticking they are even more aware that this condition of singleness is not one that they really desire and assuming that you all this morning who are single desire marriage to a godly man or to a godly woman

[ 30 : 55 ] I want to ask you how are you holding that desire for marriage how are you holding it are you desiring marriage or are you idolizing marriage there's nothing wrong with desiring marriage but there's something wrong with idolizing marriage there's something wrong with seeing marriage as essential because as desirable as marriage is marriage is not essential god is essential recently I read an article providentially it came to me in one of the online sites that I'm subscribed to and it's an article titled Can I Desire Marriage and Be Content with Singleness written by Sharon Moraney and she opens this article by talking about going to a workshop at her church for singles and a joke that she shared with a friend of hers in which she described what being single feels like this is what she writes being single sometimes feels like you belong to the last tribe of

Israel waiting to be allotted land marriage at other times it feels more like you belong to the tribe of Levi where the Lord is your portion and you will be single forever I think Miss Moraney in her description of what it feels like to be single she hits on a point that's true to life for many singles sometimes you feel like the Lord is taking too long to grant the gift of marriage but you think he will grant and then there are other times when you feel like rather than giving you marriage the Lord has given you himself and he is your portion and you will never marry but then she goes on in the article and she shares what was her greatest takeaway from the workshop and she says it's possible to long for marriage and at the same time be content in

Jesus she said that was the takeaway from the whole workshop that she attended that it is possible to long for marriage while at the same time being content in Jesus and here's how she explains contentment contentment means joyfully accepting what God has given today it isn't a mistake this season you find yourself in God has orchestrated all the events in your life for his glory and your good hold on to that with all your heart even when it's hard and doesn't make sense our God is both sovereign and good trust him everything is tempered by divine love and compassion for his people why don't you take a moment just to ponder that well crafted thought that is rooted in scripture and if you ponder it well what you would see is that even though it was written by a single to singles it really applies to all of us it applies to all of us because all of us have been called to give thanks in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in because this is

God's will concerning us and if we truly believe that the Lord is sovereign and that he is good that we can trust him with our current condition whether it is marriage or it is singleness whatever condition we find ourselves in this morning it is not a mistake it is because a good sovereign and wise God has ordained that we should be where we find ourselves in this moment in this season in this condition whether single or married God is but this is something that we need to hear not just today we need to hear this in an ongoing way and we need to remind ourselves of it especially at those times when our hearts can become dark and doubtful and we can begin to question

God's goodness and question his sovereignty in our lives and wonder whether what we are facing the condition that we find ourselves in is truly from his good and gracious hands we need to remind ourselves of this truth again and again in an ongoing way the Lord is good he is sovereign and he is working out his good purposes in our lives for the glory of his name I'll share this article on our social media platforms this afternoon I encourage everyone to read it it's an excellent article so singles that's the first consideration for you to seek to maximize God's your singleness for God's glory God's providence the second reality that you need to consider as you try to see how you can maximize your singleness for

[ 37 : 16 ] God's glory is the reality of God's purposes look again at Paul's counsel to singles in verse 28 after telling them that he thinks they should remain single he says to them but if you do marry you have not sinned and if a betrothed woman marries she has not sinned yet those who marry will have worldly troubles and I would spare you that Paul's advice to singles throughout this chapter is that they should remain single. But he assures them if they decide to marry that they haven't sinned.

They're able to, in clear and good conscience, marry. So why then does he counsel them to remain single rather than pursue marriage? He does so because he has in view the purposes of God. And he wants singles to be able to give themselves fully to the purposes of God without any distraction or without any divided interests.

And so from verse 28 to verse 35, Paul reminds singles that if they marry, they would experience the anxieties and the distractions of marriage that will take away from their undivided devotion to the Lord.

He reminds them that there are some realities of marriage that will divide their devotion and their attention to the things of the Lord more than if they were single.

as I thought about this, I have to confess that what Paul says is true. There have been times I've been studying my Bible, preparing a sermon, and then my mind went on my wife.

[ 39 : 27 ] And I was distracted. And I'm sure that's not an issue for single pastors who don't have a wife, but that's one of the realities.

And I'm sure that some other men may have stories as well. The Lord is calling you to pray, and then you're feeling drawn to your wife. And we don't have to ask what prevailed.

So Paul is giving wise and candid counsel to singles concerning marriage. But it's important to remember what he says.

He says, I'm not trying to put any constraint on you. He ends by saying that to them. I'm not trying to constrain you. And if you do marry, you have not sinned.

But these are the realities of marriage. And in your singleness, he says, consider these realities.

[ 40 : 34 ] Let's look again at what he says, beginning in verse 29. This is what I mean, brothers.

The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as those who were rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it, for the present form of this world is passing away.

Paul has directed his attention more broadly from just singles, and now he's addressing everyone.

And he's saying to all the believers, he's saying, the time has gotten short.

This world is coming to an end. Christ is returning. And we should be living in a way that is mindful of this reality.

So in essence, he's saying to these who are eager to get married, he's saying the reality is that this time in which we live, that even if you do get married, you need to live as though you're not married.

But he doesn't leave it there. He broadens it, and obviously, his list is not exhaustive. He is, it is more illustrative. His point is that when we live in this world, and we belong to Christ, we must be mindful that this world is coming to an end.

[ 42 : 05 ] This world is passing away, and Christ is going to return. And his purposes should be what preoccupies us.

Now notice what Paul is saying. Paul is not saying that we aren't to mourn. He's not saying that we aren't to relate to our spouses. He isn't saying that we aren't to have joy. He's saying that we are not to engage in those things in such a way that they so preoccupy us that they distract us from the realities that we should be mindful of as we live in this world as those who belong to Christ.

Paul is motivated by the purposes of God, and that is what he is putting before those who are single. So to the single person who desires marriage, the call to you is to give yourself to the Lord's purposes.

The call to you is to consider that you will be able to do that more fully as a single person than as a married person.

This is a very practical thing that Paul is laying before singles because here's the reality. When you consider this, when you consider what Paul is saying, you really take it seriously, you will determine whether you have the gift of singleness or not.

[ 43 : 49 ] And if you don't, it's perfectly correct to pursue marriage. But if you don't give this any consideration, you won't even know whether you have the gift of singleness or not.

Because the reality is that we can be under the pressure of the world where the expectation is that you're supposed to get married, especially after you come to a certain age, and we can be following that pressure without having given any prayerful thought to the possibility that God may have given you the gift of singleness, that you may live a life that's fully devoted to his purposes without the

distractions of marriage.

But if you don't consider this, if you don't consider the purposes of God and see what your heart is saying related to all of it, then you're really not in a good place as you think about marriage or not marriage.

It needs to be something that you have given some thought to. Now the reality is that those like me who have gotten married, we have concluded that the challenges of living as a single person, the temptations related to all of that, that those challenges are far greater than the troubles that we experience in marriage.

That's pretty, yeah, you may not articulate it like that, but if you're married and you're a believer, that's where you determine it as well. But it may not work that way for all of you.

[ 45 : 29 ] I wonder if any of you who are single this morning ever just thought of the possibility that maybe the Lord has called you to give your life in service as a single person.

to some purpose of his, whether at home or abroad. Has the thought ever crossed your mind? Is it something worthy of giving prayerful consideration to? I think it is. I think it is. And you shouldn't be fearful to doing it because one way or the other, you're going to settle it.

You're going to settle it. Whether you have that gift of singleness to do that or not. And if you determine that it's not, then you are to serve the Lord as a single person, maximize your opportunities to serve him while you hold on to the desire for marriage.

That's what the Apostle Paul is laying before the Corinthian church. And that is what is being laid before you this morning.

[ 46 : 37 ] So singles, I encourage you this morning to prayerfully consider this. Prayerfully consider what Paul is saying.

Are you mindful of this purpose that he is laying out, this purpose of Christ's return, this world ending, and how we are to be living in light of that?

And again, this is really for all of us, single or married. are we considering the opportunities that we have to give ourselves in the service of the Lord in a more wholehearted way in light of the fact that this world is coming to an end and Christ is returning?

Well, now to my third and final point, I encourage you singles to consider your passions in your singleness.

That's what Paul addresses in the concluding verses in our text this morning in verses 36 to 38. Look again at what he says.

[ 47 : 59 ] If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong and if he has to let it be and if he has to and if it has to be, sorry, if it has to be, let him do as he wishes, let them marry, it is no sin.

But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control and has determined this in his heart to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.

So then, he who marries as his betrothed does well and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. here's how I would summarize what Paul is saying.

Paul is saying, despite all my discouragement that you as a single person should not marry and should remain single, how are you conducting yourself towards your fiance or in your singleness? Paul is asking for just for some personal reflection. are your sexual passions strong? And Paul says, if so, get married.

[ 49 : 27 ] It's not sinful. And so it's appropriate to consider your passions. Paul invites singles to do that. But he says, on the other hand, if your passions are not beyond your control, and you are not acting inappropriately towards the person you betrothed to, your fiance, whatever you may call the person, your boyfriend, girlfriend, he says, if your passions are not beyond your control, but then, he says, you should not, just feel free not to pursue marriage, marriage.

And if you do, he says, you even do better. And by better, he doesn't mean morally better. By better, he means it's practically better.

It's practically better because the reality is that a single person who is fully devoted to the Lord is able to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, without distractions, without the anxieties that come with marriage.

marriage. So he's only speaking from a practical point of view, not a moral point of view. Singleness is no higher in holiness than those who are married.

Marriage is a good gift from the Lord. It is a holy gift from the Lord. But Paul brings before us the practical difference between the two.

[ 51 : 05 ] Those who are married will have the concern of their spouses. Those who are not will not have that. And Paul says, in my care for you, I want to spare you those anxieties.

I think you would agree with me that the overwhelming majority of singles don't have the gift of singleness. And so it means that sexual passion is a reality for the overwhelming majority of singles to deal with.

It is an ongoing reality that singles have to deal with. And on this point, script is very clear in instructing us.

Script is very clear in instructing us that the only legitimate context for sexual relations relations is marriage between a man and a woman.

That's the boundary for sexual relations. Everything else outside of those boundaries, as relates to sexual relations or involvement, is illegitimate.

[ 52 : 23 ] Listen to what the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 2 to 7.

He writes, For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord. For this is the will of God, your sanctification.

Let's pause and say this. When we may say, well, I don't know what God's will is for my life in this way or that way. Here's one area where we know what God's will is for us.

God's will for us is our sanctification. God's will for us is that over time we will become less sinful and more Christ-like.

But he narrows down the aspect of sanctification that he has in view. And it's sexual sanctification. What he says is, for this is the will of God your sanctification that you abstain from sexual immorality.

[ 53 : 34 ] That's a broad category. That's not just sexual relations in the categorical sense.

It's in a broad sense. Beyond just literal sexual relations. He goes on to say verse 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter.

Because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you, for God has not called us to impurity, he has called us to holiness.

Although this sermon is primarily directed to singles, this word is directed to all of us. It's directed to all of us. Being married does not provide absolute protection against sexual morality.

It doesn't. And sadly, some who, when they're single, think that is the case. They get married and find out that's not the case. In fact, it can awaken many desires to engage in sexual immorality.

[ 55 : 09 ] But Paul says all of us have to learn how to control our bodies in holiness and in honor.

And he calls us not to live with the lustful passions of unbelievers. And Paul uses language that we should pay attention to in this passage.

He says that no one should defraud his brother. And what Paul is speaking about is he's speaking about stealing from the marriage.

Reaching into the marriage situation, reaching into what should only happen in the context of marriage, and taking it illegitimately. And that's defrauding our own marriage, that's defrauding somebody else's marriage, because the reality is that there's so many people who get involved in multiple relationships before they get married.

And there's a lot of defrauding that takes place, pulling and pulling, and those people depart. And when they depart, they depart with less than they had in that relationship.

[ 56 : 20 ] The Lord wants to spare us from that. And though the world would present it as something wonderful to pursue and something gratifying to pursue and joyful to pursue, it's a road of sorrows.

believers. We don't find anyone, we don't find believers in particular, who will sit around and just reminisce and enjoy the defrauding that takes place, some sexual defrauding that may have taken place in a relationship.

And so this is God's word to us, God's word to all of us, but to singles in particular, it is pointed in your direction. Do not defraud that other person with whom you are, you may be exploring a relationship with.

And settle in your heart that if you engage in a relationship with someone, exploring to see whether that leads to marriage, that you will, by the grace of God, not engage in sexual fraud in that relationship.

It will not bring joy, it will not bring lasting joy, it may bring some momentary pleasure, but it will bring in the end sorrow that will linger in your heart.

[ 57 : 51 ] I want to commend this passage to you as well. If you have questions about what's appropriate between two persons who are not married and they're exploring a relationship, point it, point it, this passage.

And in particular, run whatever you're thinking about, whatever the question is, whatever the conduct is, run it through this part of the verse that God has called us to control our own bodies in holiness and in honor.

Ask yourself, is this holy? Is this honorable? See, it's easy to go and give you a list and say, you shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that.

You don't need the list. What we need is the guidance of God's word to ask ourselves in the presence of the Lord, is this conduct appropriate in fulfilling this command that we are to control our bodies in holiness and in honor.

If we do, if you do, it will protect you from engaging in defrauding your future marriage or somebody else's future marriage.

[ 59 : 19 ] marriage. So singles, as I conclude this morning, I encourage you to prayerfully consider God's providence in your singleness, carefully consider God's purposes, his larger purposes, his redemptive purposes as you go through your singleness, and then in a practical way, consider your passions.

and may the answer to that consideration guide you as to whether you have a gift of singleness or you don't, and if you don't, that you can hold on to the desire for marriage, trusting our good, holy, and sovereign Lord to answer that if that is his will for you.

One of the things I think is so important for you singles who want to live for Christ in this world is to remember that your identity does not come from some status that you have as married or single.

It doesn't come from some status, it doesn't come from any status that we have in this world. Our identity comes from the fact that we belong to Christ. And we will always belong to him.

And there's no status that we have in this life that is permanent. It will change. There are those who are married this morning who aren't married anymore, whether through divorce or death.

[ 61 : 07 ] But what will not change is that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and he has promised that he will hold on to us to the very end. And nothing will separate us from his love.

That's our identity. And when we hold on to that identity, we can stand against the pressure of people who are saying, well, you should be in a relationship. And you need to give the impression that you are in a relationship.

when we stand in our identity in Christ, we can stand in confidence without the pressure of the world causing us to cave to do things that we would later regret.

And so I say to you, wait on the Lord, trust the Lord, and his will for you is good, whatever that looks like. Do you desire marriage?

Hold on to that desire. But don't set your faith in that desire. Set your faith in the Lord, trusting that he is going to give you good and perfect gifts.

[ 62 : 22 ] The reality is that all of us, ultimately, our status will be married.

Whether we're single, whether we're married, our status will be married, but it's not human marriage, it's divine marriage. One day, the Lord will return and he will bring to himself all those who are his redeemed people.

Scripture calls them his bride. marriage. And Scripture tells us that there is coming a day when there will be a consummation of that marriage.

There will be a marriage supper of the Lamb. As I close this morning, let me just read in your hearing Revelation 19, 7-9.

It talks about the divine marriage that will bring to an end all human marriages. Let us rejoice and exult and give glory, give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

[ 63 : 35 ] It was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are

invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

And he said to me, these are the true words of God. On that glorious day, all of us who belong to Christ will be the bride of Christ and the status of all of us will be married to Christ.

And until that day, may we long for that day, may we look for that day where the Lord will return.

Let's pray.

Oh, Father, thank you for your word to us this morning. Thank you for all the seasons that you bring us through.

I pray for those who find themselves in the current condition of being single. Lord, would you cause them to give themselves fully to embracing your providence in their singleness, that they would seek to serve you and your purposes in their singleness, singleness, and they would consider and govern their passions in their singleness for your glory.

[ 65 : 19 ] Father, I pray for those who have questions in their hearts this morning, would you, with the power and the help of the Holy Spirit, help them to come to answers, answers that are right and pleasing in your sight.

we ask that you would do this in Jesus' name. Amen.