

Biblical Counsel for Marriage, Singleness, and All of Life: Part 2

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[0:00] The sermon text for today is 1 Corinthians 7, verses 17-24. At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare, This is the word of the Lord.

And the church, in joyful response to his revelation given to us, will together say, Thanks be to God. 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 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 freed man of the Lord.

[1:08] 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Heavenly Father, as Brad just prayed, would you soften our hearts?

Lord, turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh by your Spirit's power, so that this word produces fruit, so that it makes us increasingly holy as you are holy, so that we can live for your glory in all of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, good morning, Shoreline. And good morning, kids. Glad that all of you are here this morning to worship the Lord together.

My name is Mike. I'm one of the pastors here at Shoreline. And I want to start by telling a story. So, kids, you don't need to color anything yet. I want you to listen to this story. This is a true story, and it comes from 2 Kings 6.

[2:19] So, if you want to read the rest of the details, you can go to 2 Kings 6 later. And it involves a man of God named Elisha. Do you guys know who Elisha was? He was a prophet in Israel.

And the king of Assyria kept trying to attack the nation of Israel, but Elisha would be told from the Lord the plans of the king of Assyria, and he would tell the king of Israel, and so the plans would be ineffective.

And the king of Assyria is wondering, what in the world is going on? How do they always know what I'm about to do? And the king of Assyria's servants say, well, sir, when you speak in your bedroom, Elisha hears it.

Kind of weird, but the Lord was revealing to Elisha what was going on. And so the king of Assyria sent a host of chariots and horses to surround the city in which Elisha was, thinking, I'm going to take out the greatest weapon of Israel, the man of God, Elisha.

So Elisha's servant wakes up in the morning to go for, you know, a morning stroll, and he is seized with fear when he sees the city surrounded by these chariots.

[3:25] And so he says to Elisha, you know, what are we going to do? And Elisha said, do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.

And what was Elisha talking about? Like they were vastly outnumbered by this army. But Elisha prayed, and it says, the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

He was given a vision of the heavenly host that was right then in that moment present, protecting Elisha and the servant in that city in Israel.

Needless to say, Elisha was right. The Syrians were in fact outnumbered, not by earthly, but by heavenly power. Circumstances that at first appeared dire with physical eyes became the occasion for peace and trust in the Lord when viewed with spiritual vision.

You know, so often we look at the circumstances of our lives with merely physical, fleshly vision, but God wants us to see our circumstances with true spiritual vision.

[4:41] And that's what the Apostle Paul is helping us understand this morning in 1 Corinthians 7, 17 through 24. So if you haven't gone there in your Bibles, go there now.

If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles available on the back table. And kids, there's also worksheets back there or adults. If there's some left, you're welcome to take them. The sermon outline is there, a picture you can color, fill in the blanks.

We're walking through the book of 1 Corinthians this year as we consider the church's call to display Christ in all things. And right now, we're in the second of three weeks in 1 Corinthians chapter 7, in which Paul offers us biblical counsel for marriage, singleness, and all of life.

That's what these sermons are called, all three of them. This is part two. And here's what I believe to be the unifying thread of chapter 7. Okay, this is the main point that we mentioned last week, and here it is again.

Having purchased us by his blood, Christ calls the saints to faithful obedience and contentment in marriage, singleness, and all of life, wherever you are, as we await his return.

[5:56] As we await his return. Now, next week, we're going to see Paul specifically talking about the return of Christ. So if you're wondering, like, why do you have that little phrase there? Because Paul is showing us a heavenly perspective. We'll get to that more next week.

Last week, we looked at Paul's counsel regarding marriage, singleness, and divorce. That was from verses 1 through 16. Next week, Paul is going to more fully address singleness, speaking to the betrothed and widowed.

That's in verses 25 to 40. But here in verses 17 to 24, Paul lays out the governing principle behind all of his counsel in chapter 7.

So these verses that we're looking at today, they form the center and the heart of his response to the questions that were being raised by the Corinthians involving marital status.

Now you probably noticed that Paul repeats himself in the beginning, middle, and the end of these eight verses. Look at your Bibles. Verse 17, Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him.

[6:58] And he restates it in different words. 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.

So Paul is driving home this central guiding principle of the chapter. And to illustrate this principle, Paul uses two different examples. So he uses one involving religious status, that's in verses 18 to 19, and then one involving social status, and that's in verses 21 through 23.

So these real life examples help give traction to the guiding principle that Paul's laying out, and then they also allow him to support that principle with gospel truth.

So that's the structure of these eight verses. It's principle, example number one, principle, example number two, principle. And that's how we're going to move through here. So point number one here, the guiding principle introduced, lead the life God has assigned.

Lead the life God has assigned. Look again at verse 17. Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him and to which God has called him.

[8:16] You know, we've been talking a lot recently about the church as a collective body and offering a lot of corporate application for how we apply the gospel to our lives corporately.

At the same time, what we see in scripture and particularly in today's text is that each believer is individually called by God and must individually walk the path that God has set before them. No doubt, we do this side by side with one another, but we must not eliminate the undeniable, you know, individualness of the Christian life. So if you hear us weighting our application to the corporate side recently, it's because, first, we're seeking to push against the cultural torrent of individualism.

And second, this letter is written to the church and so much of its application is for the church corporately, but here, Paul calls each person, it's a singular, singular words all throughout these verses, each person to lead the life, meaning walk or conduct one's life as God has assigned or apportioned.

That verb, Paul used it back in chapter three when he was talking about how God had assigned him to the planting work and Apollos to the watering work.

[9:39] They're the assignments the Lord had given. And then he's going to use that verb again in chapter 12 when he talks about how the Spirit assigns or apportions out gifts to the saints to be used for the building up of the body.

So here we see that God assigns, apportions out life circumstances to each believer, a path to walk for each believer who is then to faithfully walk in those God-given circumstances.

Now when Paul says in the second part of the verse there, and to which God has called him, to which God has called him, some take that to be referring to a believer's life circumstances as a calling of God.

And while this is true in a secondary sense, does God call us to the circumstances of our life, in a secondary sense, yes. But the primary sense here of this calling is a believer's call to salvation. That's what Paul's talking about when he says calling. This is how Paul uses that word everywhere else in this text and in the book of 1 Corinthians and in all of his epistles. When he talks about calling, he's talking about our call to salvation in Christ.

[10:53] So I actually like how the CSB translates verse 1. It says, Let each one live his life in the situation the Lord assigned when God called him.

See, for Paul, and we talked about this back in chapter 1, for Paul, there is an inseparable link between calling and salvation. Those who are called are those who are saved, are those who are sanctified.

So what Paul is saying here in verse 17 is what he goes on to say in different words in verse 20 and verse 24 when he then restates this principle.

Believers ought to remain in the condition they were in at the time of their calling to salvation in Christ. And right there, church, listen, right there, in those circumstances, walk in contentment and faithful obedience to Christ.

Paul says, this is my rule in all the churches. So he's saying, hey, Corinthians, I'm not giving you some unique counsel while Paul's applying the principle to specific situations in Corinth.

[12:04] It's a universal principle for every local church and for every believer. See, it seems that the Corinthians were tempted to believe that upon conversion, they needed to alter their life circumstances.

Perhaps in order to live out their new calling in the gospel. You know, some of them had assimilated ascetic thinking into their Christianity. We talked about that more extensively last week.

They were believing that the key to a vibrant spiritual life is a severe, you know, denial of fleshly desires. And then on the other hand, the Corinthians were also affected, as we saw in chapters one through four, by this competitive, self-promoting spirit of their culture in which social status meant everything.

So we have these two misguided ways of thinking and Paul, against that thinking, he's laying down this governing principle. Don't seek to alter your life circumstances, which the Lord has assigned in his sovereignty, but instead, walk in them.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I first read verse 17, my mind instantly wanted to start applying caveats to this principle. All right, this is a seeming overreach on Paul's part.

[13:26] And listen, to be sure, as we read through the remaining verses, Paul demonstrates a sort of flexibility to the principle. But I want us to sit in the tension for a minute of what Paul says here.

And I want to ask, what circumstances of life are you currently in under the sovereign governance of God that you so badly wish would be changed?

Perhaps it has to do, as this chapter is about, with marital status. Perhaps it has to do with a job or a career or lack thereof.

Perhaps it has to do with finances or a housing situation or a military placement. Perhaps it has to do with the ability or the inability to have children.

I want us, church, to see our passage for today as an invitation to deeper trust of the Lord. Right now, today, in whatever circumstances of life God has you, I want us to see our passage today as an invitation to contentment in Christ and to faithful obedience right there in the place where God has you, where he has us.

[14:44] I want us to see our passage today as God offering us, you know, spiritual goggles to view our present circumstances with the eyes of heaven, with a gospel-shaped perspective, rather than with physical eyes alone.

And saints, let's remember what our calling in Christ is. few verses express this calling better than Titus chapter 3 verses 4 through 7.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, Savior, so that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

That is our glorious calling in the gospel. Our circumstances, church, our circumstances have been radically and irrevocably changed for the best.

That's our calling in the gospel. So having laid out this guiding principle, Paul then moves to his first real life example. So here's example number one. Paul is saying it's not about religious status.

[16:13] It's about a heart and life of obedience to God. Okay, look at verses 18 and 19.

Verse 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. Circumcision was an external mark on Jewish males that signified their consecration, their set-apartness to the Lord.

It was a sign of the covenant between God and his people going all the way back actually to Abraham. You can read in Genesis 17 and then it was reiterated in the Mosaic Law. All males who wanted to belong to the covenant community of Israel needed to be circumcised.

However, even from the establishment of the Mosaic Law, God made something clear to them that what he was really after was not a marking of the flesh but of the heart.

[17:20] So Moses commanded Israel in light of God's love towards them, what he had done in saving them from Egypt to Deuteronomy 10, 16, circumcised therefore the foreskin of your heart.

In this way, the Jews should have been primed, it's easy for us to say now, but the Jews should have been primed to receive the message that in Christ, as a result of his death and resurrection, circumcision of the flesh is no longer a requirement.

Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised, are saved by grace through faith. Amen? This is the good news of the gospel that salvation in Jesus is not just for the Jews but for people of every tribe, tongue, and nation.

However, there continued to be those in the early church that believed circumcision was required for salvation. Read in Acts chapter 15 about the council that was brought together to talk about this exact issue.

And so this errant thinking probably existed within the church of Corinth too to some degree. Gentiles were likely being told that they needed to be circumcised.

[18:35] On the other hand, circumcised Jews might have felt a cultural pressure to reverse the procedure so as not to stand out whether in the public baths or in athletic competitions in which athletes actually competed in the nude.

Now to both groups of people, Paul essentially says, remain as you are. Remain as you are. And then he gives the theological reason in verse 19.

So look at verse 19. Paul says, for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but keeping the commandments of God.

It's not about your religious status, Corinthians. It's about you having a heart and life of obedience to the Lord. Now that statement would have ruffled some feathers among the Jews.

And perhaps even been confusing at first. You know, some Jews might have argued to Paul, but Paul, circumcision is a commandment of God. So what commandments are you even talking about then when you say keeping the commandments of God?

[19:53] You know, in understanding what Paul means here, it's helpful for us to zoom out and consider what else does the New Testament have to say about keeping the commandments of God.

So first, I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Galatians. The book of Galatians. Now this book, it's a letter from the hand of Paul about how we view the law of Moses in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now in this letter, Paul uses the same exact phrase that we see here in 1 Corinthians 7 19 two different times. So first, go to Galatians 5 6. Notice the similarity here.

Paul says, for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but only faith working through love.

And then in Galatians 6 14 and 15, Paul says, but far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

[21:00] Now listen to this, for neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation. So when Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 7 19 that what counts is keeping the commandments of God, he's essentially saying the same thing as these other passages in Galatians.

Keeping the commandments of God looks like faith working through love which looks like a new creation. You know, faith working through love and manifests itself in the fruit of the spirit.

Galatians 5 22. Love, joy, same with me, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

And this is what Christians who are new creations in Christ look like in the power of the Holy Spirit. See, the law of Moses, it was brought to fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ and therefore it is no longer binding on Christians in the same way as it was upon the Jews.

Now that does not mean that we can now disregard the law. By no means, Paul would say. It was written, he says, for our instruction, just like all of scripture, but we, church, we have a greater law, the law of Christ.

[22:26] And, you know, Jesus demonstrated through both his teaching and his example how God's desire for his children is not so much an external conformity to rules and regulations, but a heart wholly surrendered to his will for his glory.

That's what God is after, a heart surrendered to him. And what does that look like? Above all, love. love above all. So I want you to go to one more passage, Matthew chapter 22.

Turn to Matthew 22. The Pharisees here are seeking to trap Jesus, which they like to try to do and it never worked.

But they're seeking to trap Jesus and they say to him, Matthew 22 verse 36, teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? And he said to them, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment and a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. So here's the obedience that God is looking for.

[23:48] Love for him and love for others. And if you want to know what that looks like, look at Jesus. Now there's far more that could be said about how we as New Testament believers ought to regard the laws of the Old Testament.

If that's a topic that you ever have questions about, come talk to me, talk to one of the elders, talk to another brother and sister in the church. But Paul's point here in 1 Corinthians 7 is that God is not concerned with our religious status, but rather that we possess hearts and lives of obedience to him.

And with that first example set before the Corinthians, he then restates the central guiding principle in slightly different words. So number three here, guiding principle restated, remain in the condition in which you were called.

That's what he says in verse 20. He says, each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Whether circumcised or uncircumcised, whether married or single, you are called, we are called, and able in the Spirit's power to walk in faithful obedience to the Lord.

No change of status needed. So you want a different job. Anybody? Anybody want a different job? Maybe one that offers more flexibility, higher pay, better benefits.

[25:17] But what does it look like for you right now, right now, today, tomorrow, when you go into that office, whether your office is your living room or a cube farm or a classroom or maneuvering, to walk in faithful obedience to the Lord.

You know, might it be harder to do so in your current job than another? another? Perhaps. But is it impossible? No.

Because in Christ, you've been given a new heart with new desires and new power in the Spirit to love God and to love others, to walk in faithful obedience to the Lord.

Hey, kids, look up here for a second. So you want siblings that are kinder, right, that maybe don't take your things as often, maybe that always lets you go first every time.

You know, but God is calling you, children, God is calling you not to love the siblings in your dreams or the ones you see on TV. He's calling you to love your real-life siblings in your real-life family.

[26:34] Now, church, that's a word for us, too. That's not just for the kids here. God has appointed siblings in Christ. Look around. They're right here in this room.

They're right here. You don't want to look around right now. I get it. God's appointed siblings, brothers and sisters in Christ, whether in the home or in the church, that we are called to love in faithful obedience to Christ.

Not the ones that we want at that other church. Not the ones in our dreams that we imagine would be amazing brothers and sisters in Christ, but these brothers and sisters in Christ. God's called us to love one another.

Father, so what is it for you? Do you desire a spouse or a better one? Do you desire a house or a bigger one?

Do you desire a car or a more reliable one? See this passage as God inviting you to deeper trust in him, in the life you have right now, as God calling you to faithful obedience in love for him, for others, right where you are today?

[27:45] And you know, at this point, I want to bring into scope a few other principles to consider as we seek to apply this central guiding principle to our lives.

First of all, Paul is not at all suggesting that a Christian should remain in a condition for which that condition involves sin. Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

By no means, Romans 6, 1, and 2. Paul is talking here about morally neutral situations, okay, but if sin is involved in the condition itself, flee from that sin.

Flee from that sin. Second, and we're going to see this in the second example that Paul gives, that this principle is not an inflexible rule, okay?

Life moves and changes, seasons come and go. God leads us into different circumstances, but Paul wants us to see that our circumstances don't need to change in order for us to walk in faithful obedience to Christ.

[28:52] Okay, Paul is slowing us down. He's giving us a heavenly perspective. He's driving us to consider the motivations of our heart, whether we're being driven by love for Christ in our decisions, in our circumstances, or love for self.

Now listen, when we are weighing a decision that involves such things as marital status, or housing, or a job, etc., it is good for us to seek accountability from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is good for us to pursue wise and loving counsel and not do things like that in a vacuum, making big life decisions in a vacuum. He's given us one another. I talked about this is for individuals, but we do walk side by side with one another by God's grace.

Okay, third, before we move on, if you are currently in a place of suffering or sorrow, Paul is not at all urging you to a callous indifference.

God does not tell his children to just suck it up and move on in life's hardships. That's not what he does. God invites his children, as Matt was sharing during our time of worship, God invites his children to bring themselves to him as they are, to lament their sorrows and their sufferings honestly in his presence.

[30:18] And he's given us a biblical pattern of lament modeled all throughout the Psalms. For, just as a quick example, some of the Psalms I turn to for lament, Psalm 13, Psalm 42 and 43, Psalm 73 and Psalm 77.

Now that's just to name a few. As Matt said, a third of the Psalms are Psalms of lament. We have wonderful examples that help lead us to express our emotions and our honest conditions before the Lord and lead us into deeper trust in the Lord.

That's what lament is supposed to do. All that said, but so often, as Paul knows, our desire so often to alter life circumstances, it usually has more to do, maybe it's just me, with being selfish or earthly minded or with misunderstanding the implications of the gospel.

And so, Paul urges the saints to remain in their current condition and right there, walk in faithful obedience to the Lord. And then Paul moves to a second example, verses 21 through 23.

So here's Paul's example number two. It's not about social status, it's about your blood-bought identity in Christ. It's not about social status, it's about your blood-bought identity in Christ.

[31:46] Verse 21, Paul says, were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. Do not be concerned about it. Now that word bondservant is also translated as slaves.

Some of your translations say slaves. You know, slavery, when we think about slavery, unfortunately, we think about slavery in our nation's history. Slavery in the first century was different from the horrific race-based slavery that our nation has seen.

It was not based on race, and conditions could vary widely. Tom Schreiner writes in his commentary that one could be born a slave, sell oneself into slavery to pay debts, be sold into slavery, or become a slave by being captured in war.

Many slaves lived miserably, particularly those that served in mines. Other slaves served as doctors, teachers, managers, musicians, artisans, barbers, cooks, or shopkeepers, and could even own other slaves.

You know, it's estimated that one-third of the population were slaves, and then another third were slaves who had been freed. And so, think about the Corinthian church here.

[33:01] Many of them, if not most of them, were likely slaves, either currently or formerly. And those who were currently slaves, they may have believed that their newfound freedom in Christ would be hindered in bondage as a slave.

In other words, they might have believed that they would be less effective for the kingdom while they are still being owned by an earthly master. And Paul, while in no way condoning slavery, which the Bible never does, he assures the Corinthians that they need not be concerned about their status.

But, he says, but if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. So, while not being concerned about their status, Paul is advising here that if you're able to gain your freedom, then do so.

And so, here we see that aspect I was mentioning earlier, that this is not a rigid and inflexible principle. So, this is similar to last week. We saw Paul forbidding divorce, but then allowing it in the case of desertion.

Paul's not telling us that our circumstances can't change, or that we should never seek to change them. But what Paul is saying is that when we came to faith in Christ, we were given entirely new desires, entirely new priorities, and we ought to filter all of life's decisions through that new gospel perspective, not according to our old worldly perspective, not according to the wisdom that this

world has to offer.

[34:36] And here's what that perspective looks like in this example of social status. Verse 22. For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freed man of the Lord.

Likewise, he who is free when called is a bondservant of Christ. No matter what our social or vocational status, no matter what temporal categories we may fall into, no matter how this world seeks to label us, our primary identity, saints, our primary identity is now found in connection with Christ.

The world sees you as a slave, Paul's saying, well, God sees you as free in Christ. The world sees you as free, well, God sees you as a slave to Christ and to righteousness.

this is the spiritual, eternal reality that transcends, that supersedes any physical earthly reality. Paul says in verse 23, you were bought with a price.

Now that ought to sound familiar to us because Paul made the exact same statement at the end of chapter 6. You were bought with a price. You know, whether slave or free, according to this world, every single person is born in bondage.

[36:09] Not to an earthly master, something far worse. Every person is born, the Bible teaches, in bondage to sin and to Satan and to death.

This is a bondage for which you cannot merely serve your time or pay your way out. The debt is too big. And it will take an eternity in hell to pay that debt.

But God, best sections of the Bible start with but God. But God, in astonishing grace, in astonishing mercy, he sent his one and only son, Jesus Christ, to earth.

To pay the price for our ransom, for our freedom, for our redemption, at the cost of his own life, offered upon the cross, we can be freed from bondage to sin and Satan and death and hell forevermore.

Every person who repents of their sin, every single person who repents of their sin and turns to Jesus by faith, whether you're slave or free, whether you're married or single, whether you're rich or poor, employed or unemployed, you are therefore by faith in Jesus set free from sin.

[37:28] And you're set free for a life lived in grateful service to Christ. If there's anyone here that is there for a life lived in Christ. If there's anyone here that is not trusted in Jesus Christ by faith, this is an invitation to that this morning.

Reach for Christ. And if you want to talk to me about that, I would love to talk to you about the gospel after the service. And so Paul, speaking to the Christians in Corinth, says, do not become bondservants of men.

In light of your identity in Christ and the fact that you're free in him, don't go on living, he's saying, according to the worldly opinions, the worldly judgments of men.

Don't go on subscribing to the wisdom of this age. Live in the glorious freedom and the joyful submission that is yours in Christ Jesus.

He's saying, live according to your new blood-bought identity. You're a new creation. Live according to that. And in light of the principle that Paul is driving forward here, he's saying, you're called to do this.

[38:43] You're empowered to do this, no matter what your life circumstances. Now, church, these truths ought to produce in us a holy contentment.

In Christ. Because our ultimate circumstances, the circumstances that matter most, have been forever altered for the best, regardless of our present temporary earthly circumstances.

Mike, but do you realize how many hours the Navy is making me work? Like, how can I serve Christ when I'm a slave to the Navy? Did someone say amen?

Jesus says, you are free in me. Right there. On duty. Right there.

Sitting around, waiting for the right paperwork for hours. You are as free as you possibly could be. A blood-bought child of God. Content yourself in Christ.

[39:44] That's what Paul is calling us to do. Content yourself in Christ and live right there for his glory. Mike, do you know how time-consuming and exhausting it is to manage the house while enduring whining and talking back all day?

I have some idea, but only in part. You know, I could serve the church so much more otherwise. And God is saying, this is the life that I've assigned you. This is it. And you change diapers. You fold clothes. You correct bad behavior before my very eyes, in my very presence. Content yourself in me, God is saying, and live right there for my glory. You know, here's a self-reflective sort of diagnostic question for all of us. Ask yourself this. Are my prayers dominated by a desire for circumstantial change or by a desire for heart change and for gospel advancement and for the glory of God? I want to ask that again. Are my prayers dominated by a desire for circumstantial change or by a desire for heart change and gospel advancement and the glory of God? [41:15] You know, it's not wrong to pray for changes in circumstance. But if that's our end goal, the Bible tells us, it shows us, if that's our end goal, change in earthly circumstances, our desires are far too shallow.

They're far too nearsighted. Let's be a people, church, that predominantly prays past our circumstances, past our preferred outcomes, praying instead for outcomes that are spiritual and eternal in nature.

So Jesus exhorts his disciples to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Matthew 6.33. In other words, Jesus is saying, pursue God's priorities as your own.

Make the prayer, your kingdom come, your will be done, the cry of your heart in life. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

And he goes on and says, and all these things, our daily needs, he's talking about, those things that make us anxious, the things that we agonize over, all these things will be added to you.

[42:32] Jesus is saying, the antidote to anxiety is contenting ourselves in the Lord and living for his glory above all else. And when we do, we can rest assured that God will care for us.

He will care for us. He will meet all of our needs. They might not be the things we thought we needed, but he will surely meet all of our deepest needs, all of our longings. If you're prone to struggle with anxiety, I encourage you to spend lots of time in that passage in Matthew 6.

Matthew 6, 25 through 34. There's an antidote to anxiety. So having offered this second real life example, Paul then drives home this central guiding principle.

Five, guiding principle driven home, remain with God in the condition in which you were called. Look at verse 24. Paul concludes, Did you notice that additional phrase?

It wasn't in verse 17. It wasn't in verse 20. With God, Paul adds into verse 24. Paul is calling believers to remain in their current status or station of life with conscious awareness that they are doing so before the eyes of God.

[44:05] They're doing so ever in his presence. He is with us. He will not leave us or forsake us. The Swiss theologian, Frederick Godet, wrote these words in the 1880s.

This is amazing here. This principle, he's talking about this central guiding principle that Paul's been talking about. This principle has been of incalculable importance in the development of the church. It is by means of it that Christianity has been able to become a moral power at one sufficiently firm and sufficiently elastic to adapt itself to all human situations, personal, domestic, national, and social.

Thereby it is that without revolution, it has worked the greatest revolutions, accepting everything to transform everything, submitting to everything to rise above everything, renewing the world from top to bottom while condemning all violent subversion.

Now I want to close by showing you just one small example of this from a saint of the past. And so here's what I'm going to do. I have this book here.

[45:30] It's called Rudy the Mailman. This is a true story. I'm going to read a story here. This is one example.

Now if you didn't know, this book is about my dad, written by my sister, Lissa. It's not that long.

We're going to read this story right now. Some heroes wear capes.

Others have shiny badges. My daddy has a mailbag. This is his story. Rudy the Mailman loved going to work. Each day he would go to the post office and load his truck with all kinds of letters and packages for the people on his mail route.

Then he would drive to deliver them. With his mailbag full of letters and some packages in his hands, he walked up and down each street delivering mail at each house. Some people had big shiny mailboxes that held lots of mail.

Other people had skinny slots and their doors were only a few letters fit at a time. Still others watched for Rudy and when he walked up to their house, he delivered the mail right into their hands.

[46:39] Rudy had been on the same mail route for a long time. He knew everybody's name and almost everybody knew his. As he walked, Rudy smiled and waved at each person he saw.

Hello, Rudy, the kids would shout. Good morning, Rudy, the mothers would wave. How's it going, Rudy, the fathers would nod. So nice to see you, Rudy, the grandparents would say.

Hello, Rudy would answer and then walk to the next house. Rudy did a lot of walking. Every day, no matter the weather, Rudy walked from house to house and from schools to businesses with his mailbag full of letters and some packages in his hands.

Sometimes, though, sometimes Rudy stopped. On cold winter days, Rudy would stop and build snowmen with the kids. Has your mailman ever done that with you before?

On warm spring days, Rudy would stop and chat with the mothers. On hot summer days, Rudy would stop and eat some barbecue with the fathers. On cool fall days, Rudy would stop and help the grandparents clean leaves out of their gutters.

[47:46] Rudy enjoyed delivering mail, but even more, Rudy liked to make people happy. So sometimes Rudy stopped and asked how a sick child was feeling or if a family had a good vacation or how a student was doing in school.

He had fun playing basketball with the kids and giving them sidewalk chalk to decorate his route. He liked to help carry groceries or do a little yard work, and he was always ready with an encouraging word or prayer.

Even while he worked, Rudy knew there were many ways to bring a smile to someone's face and let them know he cared. And when Rudy finished at one house, he walked to the next with his mailbag full of letters and some packages in his hands.

While there are many mail carriers in the world, the people on his route all agree Rudy is the best. Now my sister writes, she has a little bio here at the end.

She writes here, Most importantly, Rudy loved Jesus. This love for Jesus is what made his marriage strong and made him a good father. It is what made his smile so big and his laugh so loud.

[48:50] It is what made him stop to talk even though his route was long and stopping slowed him down. It is why Rudy learned the names of the people on his mail route and why he prayed for them as he walked. Rudy was an ordinary man who had an extraordinary relationship with Jesus.

May this book encourage you to fully engage wherever you are. Deeply love those around you and seek to know Jesus as Rudy did.

Church, here was a man not wise according to earthly standards, not powerful or of noble birth, Paul said about the Corinthians in chapter one, but a man who had an extraordinary impact on those around him.

Now how is this possible? Because like Elisha and his servant, he saw life with spiritual vision. He saw life with a gospel perspective.

He found daily contentment in Christ and then he walked in faithful obedience to him, loving God, loving others, even in the mundane, even in the ordinary, even when he wanted his circumstances to be different.

[50:02] He said, to be different. Saints, this is our calling. This is our calling. Jesus purchased us at the price of his life to call us to this and he is coming again to make all of it worth it.

Please join me in prayer. Lord, would you grant to us the spiritual vision that we see here in 1 Corinthians 7.

Lord, we want to, above all, content ourselves in Christ. We want, Lord, above all, for your glory to be seen through us individually and corporately.

God, help us by your spirit. Help us to take these words and apply them to our hearts. Lord, you apply them to our hearts in all of our life circumstances, the ones that we don't want to exist. Help us, Lord, to walk in faithfulness and obedience to you. Christ, you purchased us at the cost of your life and you are coming again.

[51:20] Help us, Lord, to live for you in every moment, big or small, in our lives. You are worthy, Lord. We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen.