

You each have your own gift

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Preacher: Andrew Wingfield

[0:00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. There's so much uncertainty in life, isn't there?

But as God's people, one of the things that we celebrate when we gather at times like this is that as God's people, there is so much that we can be certain of. God's character, we can be certain of. What God has done for us, we can be certain of. And our future hope with God, we can be certain of. And that gives us so many reasons to be thankful.

[2:22] Now, I read in Psalm 57 earlier this week, and it says, Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth.

But this verse was not written by someone in a peaceful, serene situation. The writer of this psalm had said in just the previous verse, I'm in the midst of lions. I'm forced to dwell among ravenous beasts, men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords.

But the writer goes on to praise God out of this.

I will awaken the dawn. I will praise you, Lord, among the nations. I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let your glory be over all the earth. Amen.

Let's praise God together and invite you to stand as our music group lead us. Let's praise God together and invite you to stand as our music group lead us. Amen.

[4:23] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I pray that we would see you to be worthy of all of our praise.

Please speak to us today about where maybe we're not declaring you worthy in our lives. I pray that you would be also wholeheartedly saying that you are worthy in everything we have, God.

[8:12] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[12:24] Amen. Amen.

Has anybody got any ideas what they mean?

Anyone at all got any ideas? There's two people, one going like this. And there's a body shape. And then there's a cross.

And then there's another person going like this. And then there's a body with some bits around it.

Does that help at all?

Jenny knows. Go on, Jenny. Okay, so this is our church motto for the year. Okay, so our church motto is now you are the body of Christ.

[13:36] And each one of you is a part of it. Okay, so if we, I think the next slide has got those pictures. So the pointy person is now you are.

So this is all of us. Okay, every single person here. Okay, the body of Christ is the cross. And each one of you, so it's the pointy person again, because it's each one of us, is a part of it.

So I've got some random body parts there. Okay. So we are going to try and remember this motto text. Okay, so we've got it up there.

So if we go back one, just so we've got it all. So we're going to do it all together first. And then we're going to gradually get, go back, go full. I don't know where we are now. That one. That's the right one.

There we go. Okay, so after three, we're all going to do it together. One, two, three. Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it.

[14:34] And it's from 1 Corinthians 12, 27. Okay, right. Now we're going to get rid of some of it. So we've got some of the words missing. But hopefully those pictures will give you a bit of a clue.

Just the bits that are missing. So here we go. One, two, three. Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12, 27. Okay, and now I think we're going to... Oh no, I was kind. There we go. Okay, so now we've got another part missing. We've got two parts still there.

So here we go. One, two, three. Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12, 27.

Okay, and this is the last one with none of the words except for the Bible passage quote there. So this is the last one. We need to be loud and confident. Okay, are you ready? 1, 2, 3.

[15:28] Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12, 27. Excellent.

Okay, so hopefully that will help you to remember it. You can remember those strange pictures. And it might just make you remember. Now, if we go to the next slide. We have got this picture here of a person with lots of little colored dots.

And that picture is there because all of us make up the body of Christ. So what we are going to do today is make our own version of that picture.

Okay, so you've all got a sticker. And in a minute, I'm going to ask you to draw yourself, just your face, in that sticker. Now, I know some people really, really don't like drawing.

So to encourage you, I've got some examples that some people did. So if you go to the next slide. There we go. Okay, this is the kind of quality we're looking for. All right, so if you're a person who doesn't like drawing, you are still part of the body of Christ.

[16:34] So we need your picture. You don't have to put your name on it. So no one's going to say, I have no idea who that person is there. You might recognize some of these people, but you might not. So you've got a couple of minutes to draw.

If you've got a pencil, biro's the best on those stickers. If you've got a pen, they might work. Pencils, you're just going to have to push really hard. And then I think some lovely young people will come and collect your stickers up from you when you're done.

If you don't have a sticker, there's a few spare ones at the front, because we don't want anyone to miss out, because you are all part of the body of Christ. Okay, so I feel like the worship team will definitely need one.

If you don't have one, Andrew's got some. There might be a few more at the back. How can I'm not sure? Don't spend, you know, it's not portrait of the year, so don't worry.

I think Joanne needs one over there. I think.

[17:49] When you've finished, if you just wave them in the air, and then we'll start collecting them up. Maybe you can pass them to the end of the row when everyone's done, to pass them inwards. Good.

Oh, Jameson and Thea. Do you reckon you could check them in from upstairs when everybody's done? Thank you. And maybe Elliot, could you help check them in too? Elliot Linton, is that okay? Thank you.

If you still need them, wave them in the air. 30 seconds left.

Just hold it again. Our young people don't know this, but it's Serving Sunday where they do know that.

[19:32] But some of them are going to help make this person later. So there you go. Okay, if we could just go back to the last slide, Daniel, and we're just going to see whether we can remember.

So, sorry, one more slide back. There we go. Okay, your last challenge. We are going to see whether we can remember our memory verse. Here we go. After three. One, two, three. Now you are the body of Christ. And each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12, 27. Excellent. Thank you for joining in. Thank you very much, Jackie. We look forward to seeing the body that's created from all our colored faces.

And look forward to that. Just want to share a few announcements. Now related to what we've just done, actually. The first one is that to help you to remember that motto text, that Bible verse for next year.

[20:32] We've got a postcard. Now many of you have already grabbed one of these. But if you haven't already got a postcard, please take one. There's plenty. There's enough for one each.

And you can put it up at home on your fridge or notice board or wherever you put these things. And you can learn this. Because we will test you on that motto text and see if you can do it without any prompting in a few weeks' time.

So that's for one of you each to collect and take home. And it's going to be something that we're going to be thinking about throughout the year. How do we play our part as the body of Christ doing what God has called us to do?

And what does it mean to be part of the body of Christ? Now some other exciting things coming up. Next Sunday is very exciting. After our morning service, we're having a lunch, which is for everyone.

And we're going to be up in the hub, in the halls behind us. It's going to be a simple lunch for everyone. Actually, it's going to be a very delicious lunch. The hospitality team are preparing for us.

[21:32] And everybody's welcome. It's a lovely time to get to know each other and to celebrate the fact that we are all part of that body of Christ. And following the lunch, there's going to be a brief meeting just to explore the vision of the church and our strategy for this year.

And we'll be exploring that together and praying into that. So we do hope you can stay for that after the service next Sunday morning. We need to know numbers of people who are coming to that.

So a number of you have already signed up through the prompt that was sent out on email. If you haven't already signed up, there's an opportunity to do that right after the service. Jenny.

Jenny, can you just wave? Jenny's down here, one of our elders. She's going to be in the welcome area at the registration desk with a laptop and a clipboard. And you can sign up there. You can also sign up if you see Drush.

Drush is just going to wave to me. If you turn around, if you're downstairs, you can see Drush waving. She's going to be down in that foyer at that exit with a clipboard as well. So you can sign up with Drush as well.

[22:32] Or you can follow that link that's been sent out. Or you can zap this code that's on the screen up here. So do encourage you to sign up for that. It's for all ages.

It'll be a lovely time to spend together next Sunday. Other exciting things that are happening this month. At the end of the month, we have a new job club course. This is for anyone who's looking for a change or is out of work and looking for help to get back into work.

It's a great environment to be in where you're encouraged, where you're given skills and help to work or new opportunities, volunteering opportunities, training opportunities. You can sign up on our website or on the code there.

And on the same day, that starts on the 28th of January. On the same day, we're also starting a new alpha course. We've got an alpha course that's continuing an evening one. We've got a new daytime alpha course starting on the 28th of January.

They'll be running on Wednesday mornings. You can sign up on our website. Please think about inviting someone to come along to that. It's a great opportunity to investigate and to explore what the Christian faith is all about and ask any questions that you like.

[23:38] So I do commend that to you. And also on that page, you can sign up for future evening courses that we'll be running. And then finally, the next one, please, Daniel. Save the dates. Coming up in the middle of February next month, on the 14th to 15th of February, we're going to have a weekend of activities here.

At the church building. It's called the weekend at the hub. We're going to be having some teaching together, some worship. We've got syndesis. Friends of ours are visiting a guest worship band leading some fantastic worship for us.

We're going to be doing some teaching, training, workshops, some fun stuff as well. We're going to be doing some of the things that we're going to be doing some of the things that we're going to be doing.

Save the dates and we'll say more about that next week. Now, I'm going to give thanks for the gifts that we present to God now. One of the ways that we can be part of the body of Christ, as we've been called, as we've been reminded, is through our financial giving.

And we encourage anyone who worships with us regularly to consider giving regularly as part of our worship. And there are various ways that we can do that. There are also ways that we can make a one-off gift for God's work here, including a card machine, which is in our welcome area.

[24:51] So do please make use of that if you'd like to. Let's pray as we give thanks for what we present to God. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you bless us with so much more than we need.

We present to you our giving today, however that's done, along with our serving as part of our worship. We pray that you would take what we give and use it to your glory. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, before children and young people go to their groups, we're going to sing. We're going to all stay and we're going to sing together. He's our rescuer. Let's stand and sing together.

Let's stand and sing together. Let's stand and sing together.

Let's stand and sing together.

[26:39] Let's stand and sing together.

Let's stand and sing together. Oh, the glory is the way to die Yes, the glory is the way to die Without any birthday Without any birthday We are pre-dosed forever Oh, I see the sound of it Without a vision of it Without any birthday Without any birthday Without any birthday Without any interest Come to the fold of our dream Without any birthday Without any birthday Without any birthday Without any birthday Thank you.

Thank you.

Now, if you're visiting with us and you have children or young people, at this point we have groups for all ages of children and young people.

And if you are here for the first time or if you haven't already registered, then please, parents, can you accompany your child or young person to the registration table, which is just through that door on the left.

[29:30] Get your child registered and they'll be shown up to the groups that they're going to. But I'm going to say a prayer in just a moment for the groups. Now, this week is what we call Serving Sunday.

So we've got special opportunities for our young people, secondary aged young people. We're serving. Some of them have been serving us in music. Some of them are serving on the tech desk. Don't go anywhere yet. I'm just going to pray first and then you'll go. So just stay where you are right now. And our young people are going to be doing some other things to serve and help in the other groups as well. So if you could just stay where you are right now, please.

Just stop right there. Thank you. Because it's really important that we pray, isn't it, before our young people and children before we go, before they go out. They're really itching to get to their groups, which is fantastic. So let's pray for them.

Father God, we thank you so much for our children and young people. We want to pray for those who are leading them this morning. We pray especially for our young people as they're serving in various ways this morning. We also want to pray for WOW, who will be meeting this afternoon.

[30:28] Pray that you'll bless them and give them a fantastic time experiencing your goodness and growing closer to you. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Now you can go. Well done. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. So I'd like to invite Eve up, who's going to lead us in our prayers of intercession.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Good morning, Josh. Good morning. Good morning. Sorry, I had a nasty cough all week, so do bear with me.

filling us with your spiritual food and for the promise that you listen to our prayers and answer our needs.

We commend ourselves to your unfailing love. May I say to you, Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The reading today is 1 Corinthians 7, verses 1-16, which is on page 1148 in the Church Bibles.

Now for the matters you wrote about. It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband.

The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but yields it to her husband.

[38:51] In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer.

Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command.

I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God. One has this gift, another has that.

Now, to the unmarried and to the widows, I say, it is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

To the married I give this command, not I but the Lord. A wife must not separate from a husband, but if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband.

[40:02] And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this, I, not the Lord. If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her.

And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.

Otherwise your children would be unclean. But as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so.

The brother or sister is not bound in such circumstances. God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband?

Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Amen. Well, thanks very much, Ed, for bringing that Bible reading to us.

[41:23] Let's pray as we turn to God's Word together. Father God, we thank you for your Word. Thank you that your Word touches on all areas of life, and especially some of the areas that we find most difficult.

We pray that you would speak to us now through your Word. Help us to understand. Help us to respond. Help us to turn to you.

Know who you are. And I pray that you would reveal more of your character to us as we study this passage together. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, having had a bit of a breakthrough Advent and Christmas and the New Year period, we're now returning to our sermon series, the Loving, Serving, Worshipping Church, working through the book of 1 Corinthians.

Now, if you weren't with us during the autumn, it's probably helpful anyway to have a reminder. One of the reasons that we're reading this book of the Bible at this time is how relevant it is to many of the issues that we grapple with today.

This book addresses many messy situations. And the reality of life as God's people, as the church, is often quite messy.

[42:42] But Paul constantly reminds us through this letter that despite the mess that we often find ourselves in, God loves us and he wants to work in us and through us and through our messy lives.

Paul's approach is not to shy away from the difficult topics, but to address them thoughtfully and seeing everything through the lens of the gospel good news. Have you ever been warned about looking over your shoulder?

My son, who's learning to drive, is encouraged frequently to look over his shoulder to check his blind spots when he's reversing in the car. But in most other situations, it's not helpful. When you're running the 100m sprints, it's not helpful. I remember watching a race at a school sports day and the kid was well in the lead in the sprint. But just as he approached the finishing line, he made the mistake of looking over his shoulder to see where his competitor was.

At that point, he stumbled, slowed right down, and the other kid shot past him and won the race. Now, I think as Christians, we can be in danger of looking over our shoulders.

[43:52] We look over our shoulder at someone else and say, well, I could be a great Christian if only I had a life like theirs. I'd be a great Christian if only my health was better, if only I had different neighbours.

There's just something about my situation that holds me back as a Christian. I need God to fix that. Now, chapter 7 covers a lot of ground in terms of status, race, vocation, and relationship status, whether single, married, divorced, widowed, engaged, or married to someone who's not a Christian. It seems that in Corinth, right across that range, you had people who wished they could be somebody else or wished they could be in a different situation. I'd be a good Christian if I was Jewish.

I'd be a good Christian if I was single. I'll be a good Christian once I get married, and so on. Now, in this respect, I don't think very much has changed in the 2,000 years since this letter was written, because very often we think like that.

But Paul says, in this chapter, you can be a good Christian where you are now. Rather than looking over your shoulder wanting to be like somebody else or be in a different situation, remain where you are and serve God where you are.

[45:07] In this first part of chapter 7 that we're looking at this week, Paul covers the topics of marriage, singleness, and sex. As we said when we looked at chapter 6 at the end of November, the Bible has a very high view of sex.

I gave an example back in November to imagine that you're in charge of an art gallery and you're entrusted with the original Mona Lisa painting. And what would you do in order that people could appreciate this amazing piece of art?

Would you just leave it in the middle of your gallery, have no regulations, let everyone see it, let everyone do what they like with it? Or would you call in extra security? Would you upgrade your alarm systems? Would you have rules in place about how and when people can view this art and be very, very careful about it?

Well, of course you would because if you have a high view of something, you want to protect it. You don't want to be careless with it. If you cherish something and have a high view of it, you'll want to protect it.

Now, if you read everything the Bible says about sex, you'll see it describes how wonderful it is. It explains that it is designed for a marriage between one man and one woman. And within that context, sex is beautiful, wholesome and God approved.

[46:19] We also see that it's a signpost to something greater and something more permanent. As I said before, sex is a good thing, but it's not an ultimate thing. It's not an eternal thing.

It's a signpost which points to a future reality when Jesus welcomes us as his bride into the new creation in which we'll experience greater intimacy, greater connection and joy than we can currently imagine.

So the Bible has a very high view of sex and marriage. As we'll see this week and next, it also has an incomparably high view of celibate singleness. So it'd be really helpful if you can turn with me to the passage that Ed read to us from 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

It's on page 1148. And we'll look at that passage together as we work through. So on page 1148, chapter 7, and we'll look at verse 1. It says, Now for the matters you wrote about, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

Now the quote marks that we have in this version of the NIV, if you've got an older version of the NIV by the poem, the quote marks aren't there, interestingly. But these are really helpful because it shows that Paul is responding to something written to him.

[47:30] Paul is responding to real questions from real people. And it's commendable, I think, that the Corinthians, given that they had confusion and difficulty in this area, got in touch with Paul as a trusted leader and asked the question.

Because in these kind of areas, there's a danger to going it alone and not talking about these topics. It's really healthy to have conversations around these topics, even though they might not be easy conversations to start.

Now this is particularly an area where it's very helpful for younger Christians to listen to older Christians who are willing to be honest. And please note, you can be honest in these conversations without being detailed.

Let's look at what the Corinthians said. It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. Now given what we've already read in chapters 5 and 6, where promiscuity was a real issue, it's quite surprising that they would write that.

Now we can't know for sure what was going on in Corinth, because we only have one side of the correspondence. It is likely that some of the Corinthians felt that in order to be more spiritual, they had to abstain from sex.

[48:37] It could even be linked to the, actually linked to the problem of prostitution that was described in chapter 6 and could be based around a false idea that marriage is not the place to seek sexual fulfillment, but perversely, it is okay outside of marriage.

Either way, it's based on a philosophical idea that was commonly held in Corinth that bodies are unspiritual and the spiritual part of you is separate. Now we could sum up Paul's response in verse 2 by saying, married people, be married.

So in verse 2, since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. So he begins his response by affirming the goodness of sex within marriage.

He explains that the best defense against sexual immorality is for all people to have sexual relations with their husbands or wives. To try and live in a marriage relationship which is designed to be sexual but without sex is an invitation for Satan to tempt either spouse to unfaithfulness.

Now Paul goes further in verses 3 to 5 saying that married couples should not deliberately deprive themselves of sexual intimacy. Now what he says in verse 4, if we look at that, would have been absolutely groundbreaking to his first readers.

[49:54] Not the first part, not the first sentence when Paul says, the wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. That would have been exactly what any Greco-Roman person at the time would expect a man to say in the world where sadly it was seen as acceptable for men to yield power over women and treat them as sex objects.

But when he goes on in the second sentence to say, in the same way the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife, this line was a game changer.

It would have been absolutely shocking and groundbreaking to his first readers. Greek men did not believe that their wives had authority over their husband's bodies. But Paul is very adamant.

Marriage is about mutuality. It requires as much self-yielding from a man as from a woman. Now Paul is not trying to be woke or politically correct here.

Rather, he's explaining the essence of Christian marriage that each person is to yield and to give to the other person. This is very different from what our culture says.

[50:58] Every Hollywood film and lifestyle magazine assume a self-centred approach to sex. But Paul invites husbands and wives to see their bodies as a gift to the other person.

It turns the world's view on its head. Most married people are tempted at some point every day to think wouldn't life be easy without this man or woman? And that's kind of the point of marriage. It's about the mutual sharing of life with another human who is selfish as we all are some of the time. But the goal is for each of us to give up their life for the other. Paul says that making love is good, that husbands and wives should enjoy it frequently, that they should give themselves up for each other.

And then he goes on in verse 5 to talk about one situation where couples might agree not to have sex. Now of course there are other situations where abstinence will be necessary, for example pregnancy and illness and so on.

Now what Paul says is it's only perhaps, it's only for a time and it's only so that you can devote yourselves to prayer. And I wonder actually how often prayer has been a limiting factor in the sex lives of married couples compared to career or Netflix or other big distractions that we have in our lives.

[52:09] What Paul is saying here about married couples assumes two important things. Number one, that they are talking together regularly about their relationship including the physical aspects of it and number two, that they are praying together regularly.

These are both so important for a healthy Christian marriage but sadly I find all too often that Christian couples are not doing this. Miriam and I have learnt over the years how important this is and one of the things that we've put in place and found really helpful is a weekly time at the start of the week to talk about what's going on, to talk about us and to pray together.

That's been so helpful in our marriage. Now before I move on I just want to highlight one really important phrase in verse five. The three words by mutual consent.

Everything that Paul says in this passage assumes that consent is essential. Now this phrase is remarkable considering the original context and what the pagan world thought about male power. These verses are about people lovingly offering themselves to each other for the other. They are emphatically not any kind of invitation for someone to take something without consent. It's not saying that anybody should stay in a situation where they are not safe or where anything is being taken from them without their consent.

[53:27] These verses must not be used in any way to coerce someone to do anything that they are not comfortable with. This is all about mutual submission in which we give ourselves for the good of the other.

Paul goes on in verse six I say this as a concession not as a command I wish that all of you were as I am. So Paul says I'm conceding not commanding referring to the state of being married.

He's saying if I had my way everyone would be single like me. So Paul himself is single and he's saying very counterculturally I might add at the time that the single life is preferable to the married life.

He's saying marriage is good singleness is good but if you ask him he would say that singleness is better. It's a bit like if you're in a restaurant and you look at the various choices on the menu and you really can't decide it all looks really good you could call the waiter over and ask them what would you recommend from the menu and they might say I recommend the fish pie or whatever it is.

Paul is saying he recommends the single life and he reinforces this again in verse 8 and at the end of the chapter as we'll see next week. In verse 7 he says but each of you has your own gift from God.

[54:38] One has this gift another has that. Paul is saying here that our marital status is like a gift. Now people often think about this in the wrong way. Paul talks about a different kind of gift later on in this letter in chapter 12 he talks about spiritual gifts things like prophecy administration healing these are special God given abilities.

So some people say things like that person has a gift of singleness and they mean a special ability that some people have to remain single and enjoy it but then the thinking goes that other single people don't have that gift so life's a struggle until they escape by being married.

That's the wrong way to view this concept of a gift. Elsewhere in Paul's writing he talks about salvation as being a gift. In Romans 6.23 he says the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now that's a different kind of gift it's not an ability is it? It's our status that's being given to us of being Christian and being saved. So what Paul means by gift here is the status of being single or being married.

We all have one or other of these gifts. These are God given and we're to receive them with thanks. Now on Christmas Day Andy asked people here what presents that you received that you were really happy with and we shared some of those.

[56:00] Now it might have been funnier if he'd asked what gifts that you'd received that you weren't happy with the unwanted gifts. There are some good amusing examples of these unwanted gifts in the life group notes this week.

Now I've got one gift that I opened on Christmas Day that I didn't ask for. I'll show you this. So here we go. So it's a Countryfile tea towel with a slightly bizarre portrait of John Craven.

Now much as I'm sure Countryfile is a fine TV programme can't have really watched it much and John Craven is a fine man this is a gift that I wasn't asking for and I think my sister gave it to me as a joke.

So it wasn't a gift that I asked for. Now you may have received gifts this Christmas that were different from what you asked for.

You may see your current marital status as an unwanted gift. Paul was addressing married people who didn't really want to be married. There will be other single people who don't want to be single.

[57:06] But the gift we have whether married or single is a gift from God. and we're to live for God where we are now not looking over our shoulder. Life can be painful and hard when the gift is not the one that you are hoping for or if it goes on for longer than you were expecting.

You might say to God I don't want this gift that you've given me. I want that one whether it's singleness or marriage. We can tell God how we feel but we can also lean into his sovereignty here. He doesn't put the wrong name labels on his presence. Paul goes on in verse 8 to address people who have been married but aren't now. Now scholars have different views about how to translate the word that's written there as unmarried.

There's a footnote there in the Bible it's quite likely that the Greek word actually meant widowers. And Paul says it is good for them to stay unmarried as I do. So again this is consistent with his general advice all through this chapter to stay in the situation that you're in.

Having said that in verse 9 Paul is not banning marriage either. He says in verse 9 if they cannot control themselves they should marry for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. Now this is likely to be referring to an unmarried couple who could get married but haven't yet and are already in a sexually intimate relationship.

[58:24] And Paul says rather than stay there it would be better to get married than to continue in a sin that could hurt you. Next in verses 10 to 11 he's addressing Christians married to Christians.

And here Paul is reiterating the teaching of Jesus. Now Jesus was uncompromising in his teaching on divorce and remarriage in a way that makes many of us uncomfortable.

Paul, somewhere over here says basically Christians who are married should not separate if they do they should not get divorced but either remain separated or be reconciled to each other.

Now Jesus in Matthew chapter 19 makes an exception in the case of those who are victims of adultery. Now this teaching is very clear for many situations however there are also many situations which are not covered by biblical teaching.

What if I got divorced illegitimately but now my ex-spouse has died? What if I was divorced before I was converted? What about domestic abuse? What if I was divorced for bad reasons but now I have a new partner and we have children together?

[59:31] These are complex and often painful situations. We need to approach these prayerfully seek wisdom from others and apply biblical principles when we're faced with these questions.

Sometimes as Christian brothers and sisters it's possible to arrive at different answers to these questions having diligently studied the same scriptures. We need sensitivity and grace to accept that others may come to a different view than ourselves whilst acknowledging the difficulty and pain that people often experience personally in this area.

Now the next group of people that Paul addresses in verses 12-14 are those who have become Christians after they got married so they now find themselves in the position of as a Christian being married to an unbeliever.

Now Paul notes here that Jesus didn't address this situation in his teaching but Paul gives his response. He breaks it down into two different scenarios. Firstly if your unbelieving spouse wants to stay married then he says that's exactly what a believing spouse should do stay in the marriage.

So again Paul is repeating his general advice be a Christian where you are if you're married stay married. He explains that being married to a believer can have a spiritually positive effect on a person on a family including children.

[60:47] The non-believer is exposed to holiness and the truth of the gospel through their spouse in ways that would not be the case if they weren't with them. Now what Paul is not saying is that people are automatically saved by being married to or parented by a Christian.

He says we have no way of knowing what they will decide in verse 16 but he's saying that their salvation is more likely in the end and their life is closer to God in the meantime. Now the second scenario he addresses is if the unbelieving partner wants to separate and sadly that does happen and here the advice is different.

Paul says in verse 15 let it be so the Christian is not bound to remain in the marriage. Now all this applies to people who have become Christians after getting married. The Bible strongly advises Christians who aren't yet married but looking to get married to only seek a spouse who is a Christian and we'll see this at the end of chapter 7 next week.

Now I know that many people in our church family are in the situation of being married to a non-Christian and I want to encourage you this morning you are not alone. Paul's advice applies remain in the situation that you are in.

There will be particular difficulties but God is with you. He will help you and there is support available especially through being part of the church family. Now as we finish this part of the chapter and reflect on what we heard I just want to tell you about a recent visit I had to the dentist.

[62:13] Now just before Christmas I went to the dentist just for a regular check up. Now I've always gone for regular check ups every year or two years and I'm very thankful to say that until this point I've never had anything wrong with my teeth.

Thankful for strong teeth and I've not even had any fillings up to this point in my life. Now the dentist had a poke around as they do and counter them all and then she said actually Andrew we'd like to just take an x-ray.

It's now our policy that we get an x-ray of the teeth of all the patients on our books so we'll just take an x-ray. I've never had an x-ray in my teeth before and then she studied the x-ray and there were some interesting sighs as she was studying the x-ray and then she said sorry Andrew I have to tell you that the x-ray shows that you actually have four cavities that need filling.

And she said have you had any pain or sensitivity in these teeth because it looks very much like you would have done. And I said no I haven't felt anything at all. But I have to say since then since that conversation with the dentist I became aware all through all the food I was eating over Christmas that these four teeth didn't feel quite like the other teeth.

There was a bit of a sensitivity there and a pain and I became aware that they weren't quite right. Now I'm sure that I wouldn't have felt anything had the dentist not identified that there were issues.

[63:35] And it can be like that with God's word can't it? We don't feel the problems, we don't recognise the problems until they are raised. Now this text is challenging in that it can stir up and uncover areas of our lives that need God's grace.

Aspects of our thoughts and attitudes which need infusing with God's way of seeing things and behaviours which need correcting in line with God's ways. It can make us aware of things that were buried away until God's word spoke into them.

These issues in chapter 7 are sensitive and personal but it is so important that we talk about them. Miriam and I have learned through our 23 years of marriage the importance of having other trusted Christians that we can talk to, sometimes individually, sometimes as a couple, about our marriage.

It's good that we do that with peers, as peers on peers, but it's also particularly good to have older, wiser people that we can turn to. I'm thankful for older married couples in this church family who have set a good example to younger people of what a healthy Christian marriage looks like.

It's good to talk to another in church about your situation or their situation but we need to remember that it's not good to be talking about a third person's personal situation if they are not present.

[64:55] Better to talk to the person directly or talk to an elder or a pastor if you're unsure. What we've said today may have stirred up many

feelings, perhaps feelings of hurt, feelings of disappointment, regret, guilt or shame.

Nearly all of us have failed in this area in one way or another. I want to remind you this morning that our God is a God of compassion, of love, of forgiveness, of restoration.

He's not into brushing things under the carpet but he is into transforming us, giving us healing, giving us joy and hope. I was particularly encouraged by that second song that we sung this morning.

His love never fails, it never runs out, it never gives up on us. That is the reality of God's love for us, whatever situation we're in. 1 Corinthians is a wonderful book of God's grace.

In the culture that he was in, writing this, Paul would have grappled and wrestled with his situation and with temptations that every human faces. But as he says later in this book, in chapter 15, By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

[66:09] Whatever our past, God gives us forgiving grace. And whatever our present, God gives us sustaining grace. So be thankful for the blessings, talk about the difficulties, embrace your gift, embrace your spouse if you have one, and live for God where you are now.

We're going to spend some time responding to God in prayer. We're going to ask the musicians to come and take their places. I'll ask Ben just to start playing quietly as we just take some time to just reflect on what we've heard, to reflect on what God is saying to us, and how we respond to that.

Let's just take a moment to pray quietly, and then I'll lead us in a prayer. Let's pray.

Amen.

Amen. Amen. It may be helpful for many of us here this morning to think about our next steps in response to God as we've heard his word to us.

[68:30] And for some of us it may be helpful just to resolve to go back and read back over this passage, maybe even listen to the sermon again, and just to pray into some of the issues that have been raised.

And for some of us the next step may be to have a conversation with someone, a trusted Christian friend, a leader. I do encourage you to do that, to not just ignore this if God is prompting you about something.

And there are opportunities to do that this morning. Miriam and I are going to be available at the front, at the end of the service. And we're available if you'd like to come and talk and pray about any of the issues. We have others who are available to pray with you this morning.

God loves you. God loves you. And he wants to work through these things with you. Let's pray as we respond to him.

Father God, we've heard your word this morning. And we've all been challenged by it in different ways. We admit that we have failed in some areas.

[69:41] We acknowledge that we have been hurt in some areas. Please help us all to see our situation as a gift from you. Trusting that you know what's best.

Help us to honour you in the situation that we're in. Whether we're married or single, we hear the call to not be self-serving, but to seek what is best for others. So Lord, we lift up to you our brokenness, our pain, our guilt, that we all struggle with in different ways.

We come to you as our Lord and Saviour, the one who offers us forgiveness. And we come to you to be made whole, to be forgiven and restored by you through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Amen. We're going to continue in a time of responding to God now. The music group are going to lead us in a couple of songs. Feel free to stand if you feel that's helpful.

Feel free to remain sitting if you just prefer to continue praying at this time. Just invite the musicians to lead us through a couple of songs to declare our worship to God and our devotion to him.

[70:54] Thanks, Bill. Let's sing. The light of His glory and grace.

With your eyes to the hillsides, Where His justice and mercy and grace, There the smile of His life for us, And our pleasure and strength was in your name.

Jesus, you give our hearts, Jesus, our glory and our love, We are glory and glory, our Savior and the truth, O Jesus, we've got our eyes here.

Amen. Turn your eyes to the Lord, And see Christ the dying away, O God, His love, And fear of death is gone, For we carry His life in our way.

Jesus, you give our hearts, Jesus, our glory and our love, I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him.

[73:18] I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him.

I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him.

I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him. I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him. I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him.

I will be adored in your tears, I say that I'm true, oh Jesus, with my eyes in Him. Jesus, be the Savior, it's all about you, yes it's all about you.

From my heart to the heavens. Jesus, be the Savior, it's all about you. Jesus, be the Savior, it's all about you.

[74:50] From my heart to the heavens. Jesus, be the Savior, it's all about you. Jesus, be the Savior, it's all about you.

Jesus, be the Savior, it's all about you. Jesus, our glory and our prize.

We adore Him, behold Him, our Savior ever true. the truth. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you.

Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you.

Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you.

[76:50] Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you.

Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you.

Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you.

Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. Oh, Jesus, return our lives to you. and suffer by the Lord.

Sing, how wonderful, how wonderful, and my song shall never be.

[78:11] How wonderful, how wonderful, who is my Savior, and the Lord.

That little earth, that the heavenly throne of glory, these days I am not the same.

I will be in my heart, the way through the ages, and sing of His love for me.

And how wonderful, how wonderful, and my song shall never be.

How wonderful, how wonderful, how wonderful, and my song shall never be.

[79:18] How wonderful, how wonderful, how wonderful, and my song shall never be.

How wonderful, how wonderful, who is my Savior, and the Lord.

How wonderful, how wonderful, how wonderful, how wonderful, and we are so thankful to you.

Just remain standing, if we are ready for a prayer. Lord, we thank you for who you are. You are so worthy of our praise. And we thank you, for the truth, that every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from you, the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

So Lord, help us to be thankful, help us to trust in you. Bless us as we live for you, in the places and situations where we are. In Jesus name. Amen.

[80:29] Amen. Do please sit down. Thank you so much for joining us this morning. Just want to, just reaffirm that invitation.

We would love to, to chat with you, to pray with you after the service. Myself and my wife Miriam, are going to be kind of on the front row here. We're available if you want to come and have a chat, or a prayer against any of the topics raised this morning.

Other people, if you see anyone else with a lanyard like this, or with a praying hands badge, they're available for prayer. And they would love to have a chat with you, and pray with you. We've got tea and coffee, after the service, through in the welcome area, or through the foyer out that way.

And just remind, if you haven't already signed up for the, for the lunch and meeting next week, do please sign up for that. and, do please take this opportunity to, to greet someone that you've not met before.

God bless you and we'll see you soon. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
[81:36] Thank you. Thank you.