

Part 3 - Sex, Marriage & the Unmarried

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[0:00] So we're going to press on with the third and final part of our series on 1 Corinthians 7. Well, let's begin. We have prayed already. Let's dive in.

We're on the final session of our three-part series on sex, marriage, and singleness. Not looking at everything the Bible has to say about that, but taking a more thorough, deeper look at 1 Corinthians 7 and what that teaches us on those topics.

And if you've not been with us for the series, let me give you a two-minute recap on everything that we have said so far with some qualifications. Okay, number one, Paul wants the married and unmarried to hear his instructions to either party.

So, Paul thinks it's really important, whether you are married or unmarried, that you know what the Bible says to people who are in your position and not in your position. Not only because he thinks probably if you're married, there will be a point at which you're unmarried, unless you're dead. But also he thinks that in church life, it's really good for us to also not say dumb things to one another. And actually, Christians want to encourage and disciple one another by not giving each other bad advice or things that are just plainly wrong.

[1:18] So we need to know what the Bible says about sex, marriage and singleness, regardless of what situation we're in. Secondly, we saw that God is interested in what we do with our bodies and salvation is not just spiritual, but physical.

This was the misunderstanding of the time, wasn't it? So sex is in God's good creation design. It's there for the purpose of building strong marriages and the means of filling and subduing the earth. God is interested in what we do with our bodies. Thirdly, we saw last week that our view of marriage needs to be shaped by these great Bible events of creation, fall and redemption.

Creation tells us that marriage is good. Sex is good. It's for marriage. The desire for marriage is built into us as humans and is a good desire. The fall tells us that marriage is hard, that marriage exposes our sin and exposes us to the sin of another and ends ultimately in death or perhaps. Sadly, divorce. And thirdly, redemption teaches us that there is a great wedding day to come for all of God's people, married or unmarried.

[2:25] And it's that day, not these marriages, that will finally satisfy our desires for intimacy and for love in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And because of that, that needs to shape our view of marriage. So that's two weeks in two minutes. You might think, Steve, why could you not be so succinct earlier? But we are all learning, right?

So now we're going to get back to 1 Corinthians 7 and we're going to see what it has to say about singleness. And the first thing I need to say to you is that the word singleness is not a very helpful word. It was pointed out to me by Vanessa this week that Paul's word here is unmarried, not single. Singleness implies aloneness. And that's not how Paul understands being unmarried. Unmarried is the category that all of us will be in or are in at some stage in our lives, either because we've never married or because we're widowed or our partner has left us in the way that's described in the passage.

So not single, but unmarried. So that's a correction to the series title. OK, with that in mind, I'm going to start. We've done every time by reading 1 Corinthians 7.

[3:37] So it's familiar to us. So eyes down on the Bible and I will read it to you and maybe have your antenna up, especially for what is being said for those who are unmarried. 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 fulfill 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. 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 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.

[4 : 44] Now, to the unmarried and 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 her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband, 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.

But 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.

[5 : 51] How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife? Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them.

This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called?

He should not become circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing.

Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each person should remain in the situation they were when God called them.

Were you a slave when you were called? Do not let it trouble you, although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person.

Similarly, the one who was free when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price. Do not become slaves of human beings. Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.

[6 : 58] Now about virgins, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think it is good for a man to remain as he is.

Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on, those who have wives should live as if they do not.

Those who mourn as if they did not. Those who are happy as if they were not. Those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep. Those who use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them.

For this world in its present form is passing away. I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs. How he can please the Lord.

[7 : 56] But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world. How he can please his wife. And his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs. Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit.

But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world. How she can please her husband. I'm saying this for your own good. Not to restrict you. But that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

Is anyone worried that he might be acting, not acting honorably towards the virgin he is engaged to? And if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion, but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin, this man also does the right thing.

So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

[9:07] In my judgment, she is happier if she stays as she is, and I think that I too have the Spirit of God. Now, we're going to try and zoom in on what those verses have to teach us about being unmarried.

And I think there's lots of ground to cover. So I'm trying to summarize it with seven statements, which might not cover absolutely everything, but I hope covers most of it. And then we're going to have some opportunity for questions and comments, and then we're going to have an interview at the end as well.

So number one, the first thing it says, and I think quite a lot of what it says about being unmarried is very countercultural, certainly countercultural in the church culture at least, if not in the world.

Number one, it is good to stay unmarried. Verse eight, Paul says it directly, doesn't he? Now to the unmarried and the widows, I say, it is good for them to stay unmarried as I do.

In verse seven, he calls being unmarried or being as he is a gift, literally a charisma, a charismatic gift.

[10:18] Now, perhaps before we get directly into what he's saying here, we should perhaps pick up on Paul's language here when he says, I say. Now, to the unmarried and the widows, I say. You may notice that as I read it, that throughout the chapter, you get these comments, don't you?

I say, not the Lord, or I give this command, not I, but the Lord gives this command. Now, that doesn't mean that there are certain parts of this which are part of the Bible, because Jesus said it. And there are other parts which are Paul's words. So they're not really the Bible. You don't really have to listen to them. That's just Paul's opinion. That's not what's going on here. We're not allowed to pick and choose. All of this is God's word inspired by the spirit of God.

Rather, the point seems to me that Paul is distinguishing between places where he is relaying the teachings of Jesus that he has received and places where he is speaking with his apostolic authority.

And you need to read both in the same way, because both of them come with the authority of the scriptures. But it means that Paul is very conscious as he speaks that Jesus, in his earthly ministry, had a lot to say about being married and being unmarried, a lot to say about sex and divorce and eternity.

[11:27] So Paul says that it is good for them to stay unmarried. Now, if you've got your theological brain in gear, and it is Sunday evening, and so you might not.

But if you have, that statement should be really shocking to you. It is good for them to remain unmarried. Why should that be shocking to you? Well, because in Genesis 2, God says the exact opposite, doesn't he?

Right? So in Genesis 2, God looks at Adam alone in the garden and says, it is not good for man to be alone. And then Paul says, no, it is good for you to be as I am.

So what does he mean? Well, it means, doesn't it, that in a world of the fall and redemption, the good of Genesis 2 is not quite the same as the good of 1 Corinthians 7.

The good of Genesis 2 is to do with the filling and subduing. So it's not that God is looking at Adam on his own in the garden and goes, oh, poor Adam, he must be really lonely.

[12:34] I'll make him a wife. It's not that, is it? It's rather that God looks at Adam and goes, I have given this man the responsibility to fill and subdue this world.

And it is not going to be possible for him to do that on his own. And so he makes a wife for Adam. And you know that's right, don't you?

Because if it was loneliness that God was trying to solve or a desire for companionship was the big problem in Genesis 2, then the creation of another man would have been an adequate solution.

Maybe even the creation of the animals might have been adequate company.

You know, you can go on a fun dog walk, right? But God makes woman, not another man, because he wants the woman to be complementary to Adam in fulfilling the creation mandate.

But Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 is not just thinking about creation, is he? He's thinking about the fall and he's thinking about redemption. And he thinks that in the light of the fall and the light of the redemption that we have in Christ Jesus, it is good to remain unmarried.

[13:43] Being unmarried in that world is a gift, he says. It's not a curse, not a curse to loneliness. It's not not being able to fulfill the purposes of God.

It doesn't mean even having no involvement in the lives of children. Paul talks a lot about spiritual children all the way through the scriptures. And so remaining unmarried is not bad when we're part of the family of God.

Now, I'd suggest that that means, doesn't it, at the very least, when churches or Christians talk as if being unmarried is bad, or as if being unmarried means that you are inevitably lonely, or as if it's some kind of second rate way to live your life.

If that's what you think or that's what you say, you are being unbiblical. You are contradicting what Paul thinks here, because he thinks in a world of a fall and redemption that's ours in Christ Jesus, belonging to the church family, actually, it is good to remain unmarried.

That's point number one. Point number two, it's not always good to remain unmarried. You've got to get this with 1 Corinthians 7.

[14:53] You can't just take half of it and run away with it and not grab the other half. In case we go to an extreme and get this all muddled up, Paul is really clear, isn't he?

Verse 9. There are some situations in where it should be good to be married, he says. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. Now, I'm told by the boffins that this word, burn with passion, is only one word. The word passion has been added by our English translators. It's very difficult to translate.

I'm no Greek whiz, right? So all I can do is read what the boffins say and have a think about it myself and try and pass it on to you. But it does seem to me, from what I've read, that Paul is not so much saying that if you don't think you can cope without sex, you should get married, right?

It is not the desire for sex that should fuel the desire for marriage. That isn't it, I don't think. That would seem a really, really unwise motive for marriage, right? Not least because there's a lot more to being married than having sex, which Paul seems to know about here too.

[16:03] Rather, it seems to be that the burning here is associated with an unmarried couple who are falling in love and are perhaps ashamed or guilty in knowing that their relationship has gone or is going beyond friendship.

And if that's the case, the unmarried couple should marry. And that's similar to what he says in verse 36, which we'll come to in a moment.

Again, this is so helpful, right? Remaining unmarried, whilst also flirting or leading someone along, is not obedience to 1 Corinthians 7 instruction to remain unmarried.

It's disobedience to its instruction to get married. You know, if in God's providence you are with someone that you are attracted to, where you have not just a friendship connection, but also a physical desire for one another, and you're not prohibited from marriage, either because you're of the same sex or because they're an unbeliever or because they're already married, then Paul says you should marry.

Now, Paul is not prescriptive here about how this should work in practice, but I think you can probably make a pretty good argument from 1 Corinthians 7 that Paul does not think that having like super long engagements or really strung out dating or playing the field is really a very good way to go about this.

[17:20] Either you're in a relationship, either you're in a relationship, either you're in a relationship, either you're in a relationship which is heading towards marriage, in which case all things being equal, get on with it, or it is not, in which case stop. That seems to be the distinction that he is making.

Number three, contentment should be cultivated. It's interesting, the instructions for contentment are not exclusive to the unmarried, and it's interesting that he picks up a whole load of different case studies, doesn't he, in this.

So circumcision is one, and slavery is another. And we pointed out in the very first week that he is not commending slavery in any way. In fact, he says, don't become slaves and do avail yourself of

freedom if you can.

But what he is saying is that God is sovereign over the position that you find yourself in. And I think it's implied in verses 24, 26, and 27 that that also goes for your marriage status as well.

So end of verse 24, if you look at it, remain in the situation you were when God called you. In verse 26, he is to remain as he is.

[18:29] And at the end of verse 27, he is instructed to not look for a wife. Again, be clear, Paul is not forbidding marriage. We've seen that. Nor is he saying that it is wrong to desire to be married.

Nor do I think is he prohibiting all attempts to seek a husband or a wife. Rather, he's concerned for contentment. We don't get this out of proportion. Marriage, says Paul, in a world of fall and redemption does not answer all of your problems.

So it's really important if you are unmarried that you do not think or behave in such a way that makes you believe that marriage would solve your problems.

It won't. It might solve some of them, but it would bring you other ones, as Paul. So be content and cultivate contentment. If you are unmarried, don't put your life on hold until you marry.

Because your life is not on hold. You are able, according to Paul here, to live a fulfilled and fruitful gospel-shaped life in the service of the Lord Jesus. So trust the Lord that he is more than capable of changing your circumstances in his time.

[19:43] Live life and enjoy the particular blessings that come with being free from a husband or wife, which we're going to look at in a moment. Don't imagine that marriage will solve all your problems.

Number four, the unmarried is spared, are spared, I think that should be, a certain kind of suffering. Now we saw this last week, so I'm not going to spend a huge amount of time on it.

Verse 28 is very clear, isn't it? That Paul thinks that marriage comes with a particular kind of problem. Instructions on marriage are not designed to spoil life for the unmarried, but to spare them suffering.

Paul wants the church to understand what it means to be unmarried because he wants people not to enter into difficult marriages, which would bring suffering to the church, which they would be spared if they didn't.

It's really fascinating, isn't it? In the Corinthian culture, which sort of thinks sex is quite a small thing because God's not really interested in our bodies. So there's lots of sex in that city going on in all sorts of different places, right?

[20:51] He thinks, right, the way to organize this is through marriage, but not through lots of bad marriages, which will actually make the situation worse.

Now the implications of this are really clear, aren't they? We must not idolize marriage. It's easily done, isn't it? Churches especially do this, where creches bulging and people are getting married. But the Bible is really clear, marriage is not salvation. And whilst it's a gift, even a desirable gift, perhaps a gift that you would love to have, it is not the key to a happy and fulfilled life in a fallen world.

And so really churches are meant to be the best place to be unmarried. Right. Making sure that marriage is not the secret key to fitting in at church or the only way to find friendship and companionship in church.

Because although there's suffering associated with being unmarried, there is also suffering involved in being married. And Paul thinks that's significant and we should spare people from it.

[21:58] Number five, I couldn't quite work out how to put this, but I've just gone for this, but the unmarried life is less emotionally complex. I don't know whether that's really a fair summary of verses 32 to 34, but you can write a different heading if you like.

We looked at that in a bit of detail last week. Paul seems to suggest that devotion to the Lord is simpler for the unmarried person. Listen, the unmarried is not having to negotiate the complexities of marriage and the emotional needs of a husband or a wife.

So it is easy, not as in it's easy. I don't think Paul's saying, listen, if you're unmarried, a Christian life is really straightforward. You're going to be really, really holy because it's dead straightforward.

He's not saying that. He is saying it's easier as in it's less complicated. I think this is perhaps counterintuitive. Vanessa and I have done quite a lot of marriage prep and a bit of marriage counseling.

And I think it's common for Christian couples to marry, assuming that what's going to happen when they get married is that their desire to spend time with the Lord and pray is going to double. [23 : 11] What they're imagining is that they will both bring their desire to read God's word together. And actually, that will make it more likely rather than less likely. But what they don't account for is the fact that both people are sinners and they're combining also their sinfulness as well as their newfound Christian lives.

And so what actually they find is that it is half as likely, not twice as likely. Because you don't only have to sort of resist and pin down your own sinful desire not to spend time with the Lord and pray, but also someone else's as well.

And that's really difficult. And so you get married and you think we're going to just be reading the Bible and praying together. It's going to be really easy, but actually find it's really difficult. It's the same with attendance at church.

When you're married, it's not just one of you that wants to go to church. You both have to want to go in order to be able to go together. Both of you have to want to serve on the youth road and not just one of you.

Both of you have to be willing to forego your Monday nights for one of you to attend a leaders meeting. Not just one of you. And Paul says, rightly, doesn't he, that's complex. That brings a complexity to the Christian life, which makes it more difficult.

[24 : 29] And so it's simpler, he says, less emotionally complex to be unmarried. Number six, it is to be chosen and not compelled.

Again, have a look at verses 36 and 37. Let me read them to you. If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably towards the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants.

He's not sinning. They should get married. And that's similar to what we looked at before. But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion, but has control over his will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin, this man also does the right thing. Here notice that being unmarried is not to be compelled upon somebody. In other words, it is wrong for churches or for us in our discipleship of Christians to ban marriage or prevent marriage or stand in the way of Christian marriage.

It sounds crazy, doesn't it, when you put it like that, but it does happen, doesn't it? And while it should not be compelled, still, says Paul, it is possible for people to choose to remain unmarried.

[25 : 45] In other words, it's a choice. You can choose to remain unmarried. You can't always choose to marry, can you? At least two people have to agree on that.

But you can choose to remain unmarried. And Paul says the complexities of living this side of the fall and subject to the plan of redemption mean that remaining unmarried is a good choice.

Certainly a better choice than choosing to marry just any old person, especially if that person is an unbeliever or someone who you know will take you away from living for the Lord. Now, I think this is probably the most difficult part, right?

Because I think probably there's some of you in the room who are unmarried. You might not feel like you've chosen it. In fact, if you had a choice, this is not something you would choose for yourself.

And that's the pain and the difficulty. And we're going to talk some more about that in a few moments. But we do know, don't we, that the ideal husband or wife that we have in our imagination, who we would love to choose to marry, the one who is perfect, right?

[26 : 52] The one who makes us a better person, the one who is unfailing in their attention, who loves us graciously and forgiving. You know, don't you, that that person is the Lord Jesus and no other person.

And that marriage is yours in the gospel, right? And so it's not that Paul is saying in choosing to remain single, you are choosing to deny yourself all of the brilliant things about marriage.

Because all of the brilliant things about marriage will be yours in the Lord Jesus. And all the brilliant things about marriage don't necessarily belong to every married couple in church either.

Because of difficulties and challenges that they might face in their marriage. And even one day, they will be robbed of them when one of the partners dies. So Paul says just what Jesus says, doesn't he, in Matthew 19, that choosing to remain unmarried is for some a wise option.

But it must be their choice and must not be forced on them. That's number six. Number seven. Happiness is not excluded for the unmarried.

[28 : 05] We've touched on this already, but Paul says it directly. Verse 39. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes.

But he must belong to the Lord. Let me just say a bit about that before I read the next sentence.

Marriage in the Bible is an institution, okay? It's not something that we are free to invent.

But marriage is given to us by God as an institution which binds us to one another, right? So it is a loss of your freedom. You are binding yourself to one another as long as you live, right?

That's what marriage is. Marriage is not something that we invent. It's something that we enter into that God has designed. Okay? That's verse 39. In my judgment, he says, talking about the widow, she is happier if she stays as she is.

And I think that I too have the spirit of God. Now notice that he doesn't say it is, you know, it's probably possible that she might at some point experience happiness.

[29 : 10] He says, no, she will be happier, right? Again, greater happiness will be hers. Again, that might be really counterintuitive. We might think, really?

Is it actually possible? But I think what Paul is saying here is that actually lots of the blessings of marriage and of family are ours in the church and ultimately in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if we are longing for and looking forward to those things, happiness and joy can be ours in Christ in that way. Okay, so those are seven things that Paul says.

I'm going to have an interview in a minute, but I wanted to give you opportunity for questions and comments. Do we think, maybe, it's quite difficult for you to yell them out to me?

Why don't you talk to the person next to you and then you can shout out what they say? We'll use the Clifford and Hilda rule, as we call it.

[30 : 09] So yeah, go for it. Talk to the person next to you. What stands out from there? What do you agree with? Maybe disagree with? What have I missed? Okay, let's feedback.

Any comments or questions that you think would be helpful for us all? Rebecca? Well, I guess maybe you could ask him.

I doubt that he's being snippy, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I think that's what he's pointing out, that he has the spirit, he's writing in the spirit.

I think, I wonder whether maybe because he's, it's sort of a bit like a highlighter, isn't it? That says, actually, this is really, this is really true.

And maybe, maybe with some of the things here, more than anything, you know, married people read verse 28, right? And they go about the trouble, they go, oh yes, that's right, right?

[31 : 20] But maybe some of the stuff in that we've looked at this evening on unmarried people, you read some of the stuff and go, no, that's not actually, I didn't choose this. I didn't, you know, this isn't great. And so he's trying to underline that, yeah, he's not just making this up, I think.

Any other question? Amy? I disagree with it with number five, the in my life is last motion complex. Right. Yeah.

From personal experience, I think, I felt like more anxious when I was single. Okay. Because I'm kind of, kind of disappointed in a way, because within the church, it seemed like everything was good for marriage and family.

And being a single person was very hard. And it seemed like there were more single women in the church than single men. So after some friends around got married and stuff, that became quite difficult.

And I think, yeah, it was more emotionally challenging for a single woman. Yeah. Let me try and summarise that so that people who are listening online can follow along. So we're saying that a slight disagreement with number five, that actually being unmarried in church as a woman was difficult.

[32 : 35] It was difficult because church was often set up for married couples. And there's people around them getting married. And then not as many men in the church and anxiety and those kind of things.

Yeah, I think you're right. That's why I'm not, like, super sure that that's a good way of putting it. I think what I'm, and I didn't want to just, I wanted to kind of broaden it out to say, so he's not saying, which I think is, this is the common mistake.

I think he's not saying, if you're unmarried, you can be, like, really, really fruitful in gospel ministry. And if you're married, you're just not going to be fruitful in gospel ministry. I don't think that's what he's saying.

And that doesn't really scan either. What I think he's saying is that there is a sense of responsibility for your, the well-being of another adds a layer of complexity to living for the Lord, which is complicated.

If you, if this is why verse 39 is really important as well, isn't it? Marrying in the Lord. If you marry someone who loves the Lord and who sees their job as praying for you and encouraging you and building you up, that's brilliant, isn't it?

[33 : 47] Often people don't marry like that, do they? And actually that makes it really difficult and challenging. But yeah, I think you're right. And I think probably the other answer is that churches shouldn't be set up for married couples.

Yeah. We really need to resist that. Okay. Matt, go on. Last one. Yeah. I think what this also does is, is, is, um, want to marry people or single, um, single people who want to be married.

The reality of what it is to be married, like you said. If you look at, look at, you know, this is also what married people are going to, uh, go, uh, go about.

So it's almost like when you become married, you'll find your, it's almost your one and there's, your two, your two become, your two becoming one. It's almost, you'll find, you'll, you'll, you'll have a new identity and everything within that.

So I think that's, that's, um, he's not, he's, he's not mentioned, he's not mentioning that. Yeah. But being someone who's married and seeing, being what, what he's, what he's saying, it's almost, he's, and the struggle he's talking about, it's almost like, uh, like, yeah.

[35 : 02] I mean, I, I get that. Yeah. Yes. I think, I think you're right, Matt. So I think it's really important for married people in the church to understand what it is to be unmarried and have a good theology of being unmarried.

Because it's really easy for married people in the church to, to look at the unmarried people in the church and say, the big thing that they need is to get married. The big thing they need is Jesus. Right. We all need, yeah. We should have your hand up. Was it, was it a fast one? Quick one. Last one. Yeah, good one. Okay. We talked a bit about this last week, whether the present crisis was something just unique to Corinth or whether it was carrying on.

So I think, and we decided the answer was probably both because, so the present crisis could be something specific in Corinth and might well be. But he goes on to say that time is short, verse 29. And he goes on to say, verse 31, for this world in its present form is passing away. So I don't, I don't think it's... He does think it to singleness or whatever.

[36 : 20] For this world in fact, to be a gift. Yeah. Is the gift something you really know as other gifts or how is the connection there?

Well, I think the gift part in verse 7 is, you know that you have the gift of being unmarried or the gift of being married because that is the status in which you're in, I think.

Yeah. Because you know, oftentimes what happens is people end up being single and then they live miserably or not, but most of the time it's what we hear. And that shapes their lives.

And I think that's what he's encouraging, is that contentment. Yes. Yes. And he gets to that point and then you realise, oh yeah, I'm a woman. Yes. And so on, it's a sidekick, but then you live miserably because they're not knowing you and have that gift.

Yeah. Yes. Okay. Yes. Yeah. So he's encouraging contentment. We are going to have to move to the interview. Is that your question or is it not? I just have a question on my mind. Go on. I mean, someone said, what's he said about, it's not just romantic, it's a person, because he's reference to the time of faith.

[37 : 24] This talk is all being about, so Paul is talking about, Oh, wow.

So we've got like five minutes left. I think you have to say that 1 Corinthians 7 in the Bible is not just specific to the Corinthian context, but is teaching us truth about being married and unmarried.

And you can say that both because it mirrors what Jesus says in various passages, like in Matthew 19 and other places. So I don't think that he would say now, oh, everyone should get married because we live in a really woke culture.

I don't think that's right. Anyway, interesting question. I am going to ask. So Jen has agreed for me to ask her a few questions about being unmarried and in church and what that's like.

And so Jen has been very generous to me in helping me out because I do feel like it's helpful for us to hear someone's experience on these things. So thanks, Jen.

[38 : 35] Come and join me at this microphone. So I have. Before he starts, I should just say I am not the poster person for being unmarried.

Being unmarried, you could be single, never married. You could be single with children. You could be single because you're divorced.

You could be single because you're widowed. So I think that's important for myself. I'm single, never married, no children. Is that right? That's it. Just so you know, I could only talk.

Sorry, I can only speak for my context and not anyone else's. You have loads of spiritual children, don't you? Lots of lots of you've been involved in the lives of lots of children.

Yes, that's true. I just wonder whether you could tell us a little bit, Jen, about your your experience of being an unmarried woman in church. What have been the challenges?

[39 : 38] What have been the blessings? And maybe just touch on how that's changed over the years as well. I wasn't quite certain how to answer this question. But there's two things that I suppose grounded me.

And one I heard from a Christian answer question and answer session when I was about 18, 19. And it was the idea of loving God before all others, even my desire.

Because it was a question about dating and whether you should be married or not. And it's a question that came up every single year. And if as a unmarried person, I was thinking more about that than God, I knew that was wrong.

And I think it sunk into me that I should be I should love God more than my desire to be married.

And I think that helped me as I got older through the years, just having that in my mind.

It wasn't just get married and get married to anyone. I had an advice from one of the ladies in the church years ago. She said, well, there's no guys in the church. You go out there and get one and bring them in.

[40 : 45] And then you marry that person. That was stupid advice. But, but, but. It was an older lady, right? So you have to listen. You have to listen and take it from there.

So that was the first thing. The other thing is about if God saves me and he can keep me. And so that in my mind, there is no, it's a no brainer that he can keep me as an unmarried person on this earth and in heaven.

So if I trust God to save me, then I trust God to keep me as an unmarried person. And those two things, I suppose, has grounded me in this thought and being unmarried.

Does that make sense? Yeah, that's right. Okay. I keep going. Challenges. Right. The big one, the challenges in the church, not so much out of the church, was that I had missed the mark for not being married.

And you felt that because it was always the question was, are you going to get married? When I was younger, I obviously thought I was going to get married.

[41 : 57] And a lot of people were saying to me, are you going to get married? Or isn't it your turn next? Like Anna's got a wedding coming up. Single people, you know this. You know what's going to happen.

You're at the wedding. Someone's going to say, it's your turn next. Who are you seeing? What's going on? And that is a bit awkward. And then I would also have people saying, let me pray for you so that you can have a husband.

This has happened on several occasions, but people are praying for me for that in a way that's not quite appropriate. And then so the blessing is in all of this is that when I pass the age when people thought I should be married, I'm going to say, praise the Lord.

They stop asking me those stupid questions. Because it needs to stop. So that wasn't as good. Like socializing with friends that are married.

When you're younger, I suppose it's easier because I think our church, all the churches generally make an effort to help people to be included.

[43 : 03] But as you get older, how do you fit in? And this is where the struggle was. When you're in a family, you get invited to family occasions.

And you get invited because you're part of the family. But in the church, it seems as if married people get invited to certain things. And if you're in a group of people serving, the married people will go out.

And if you happen to be the only single person, you're left on your own. And so that bit isn't helpful within the church. And so it could be better.

That's the best way of putting it. I'm reading quickly. Blessings. Knowing this is the blessing as well that has grounded me. And that didn't come until 35, 40, that age.

This is what happened. Knowing what God has called me to do and then doing it. That is the blessing that I've got. And it's been the biggest change in my life over the years.

[44 : 11] And that's been the change within me, not within the church. Because the church has just about stayed the same in that context. And I can stop there.

Well, I think that relates to the next question, doesn't it? About whether being unmarried has been something you felt called to or not. Yeah, which this is another question that I thought was weird. I thought, what?

Called to? Okay, right. It's yes and no. Because when you're younger, you always feel as if you're going to get married and have children.

So when does that change? I have no idea. But in another sense, I think maybe yes. I'm called to it because that's my situation now.

But also, but over the years, I see that I'm called to it because God has brought contentment and self-control. So I think that has helped me over the years.

[45 : 11] And it's useful. And another sort of practical thing. It just seems as if people, ladies, especially not guys so much, they're always asking me about singleness.

How do you cope at that age? How do you cope at the same? And what do you do? So maybe I'm called to it. I can say that now. Because people were seeking you for advice.

That's a sign. Yes, maybe. Just help us out with Paul's vision of the life of the unmarried person in 1 Corinthians 7.

There's some things that are surprising in there for us. How can we as churches honor that and kind of reflect the 1 Corinthians 7? Every question he asks I thought was weird.

Right. You don't have to say that. Oh, sorry. You can tell me that afterwards. Sorry. That's fine. This idea of the church honoring the single people.

[46 : 14] I'm not quite certain that's quite right. Why not honor the married people? So it's not so much about honoring them. It's more about acknowledging the situation that they're in.

And that they should live as an unmarried person as long as they're in that position. And so live like that, serve like that, and keep moving.

And also live in a righteous way with the undivided devotion to God. And I think that is important. Because when you're torn between wanting to be married but thinking I need to be here.

So that tension and that emotional conflict is real. So I do agree with you, Amy, with the comments you made. It is very real.

And it's not as straightforward as this is the right thing to do. Both are the right thing to do. But where does the Lord want you to be? And what does he want you to do? Does that make sense?

[47 : 20] It's really helpful. One last weird question. No, this one was good. Oh. This one was good. You've touched on this already in some ways, haven't you?

But what should we be avoiding as churches? Okay. The big thing is sort of speaking as if marriage is the only good thing that God gives when it comes to relationship.

It's not. But we speak as if it is. And that's where the conflict comes within a person. Because you see it. And it is especially in the church.

Because the idea is that every young person growing up, they should be married. You hit 20. Hang on, what's going on? You hit 30. And people are getting married later.

So it's not as bad as 30. But you get much older than that. They're thinking, what's going on? And it does seem a bit unfair. So they should avoid that. And I do like the fact that the passage we're looking at, 1 Corinthians 7.

[48 : 24] It's the Christian way it says that it's better for them if they don't marry. And also that the person is happier. Because it never appears to be that way in the church.

You're not a happy person if you're unmarried. Which does seem weird and strange. It's a good thing I was talking to Vida for this. It does seem just crazy that that doesn't...

I don't know. People don't understand that. You are happy as an unmarried person. It's not that you're unhappy. You're just trying to work out how does your emotions fit, your desire fits with what God wants you to do.

And that's the tension. And I don't actually think a lot of people can help you with. I think that is something between you and the Lord. You can ask for advice. And I think that would be a good thing.

To ask for advice and help. What more? And I was just going to say. Since you've been here. [49 : 30] I've heard us speak about this subject. One in a sermon and one in this discussion group. Just twice. Including this time. And previous to that. I can only really remember one other person.

As application of a sermon. Mentioning that if it wasn't for all the single people. That we had serving. We wouldn't be able to run our ministry.

That was the only time I've heard. Being single. Being unmarried. That's a good thing for the church. Because we're able to have so many ministries taking place.

And so. That bit is weird. And I had three things. That we should. If you want to pray. For those of us that are unmarried. One thing.

Live a devoted life to the Lord. Pray that that's what we do. And we don't get it twisted in our mind. Or in our emotions. We live wholeheartedly for the Lord. Also.

[50 : 29] Pray about our relationships. Our relationships at work. At home. And in the church. Because. When you're. Everyone works.

And so most of your time. Are spent with those people at work. So. It's a witness. But also. You still have to be careful. To who you get close to. Because if they're not a Christian.

It's still dangerous. Because you're mixing with them all day. So please pray about the relationship.

But also. Even if they say that they're a Christian. We all know this. Christian and Christians.

And how people live. So. Even that you have to be careful with. With your desire to be married. Just because someone says that they're a Christian. You think. Well that is a person. There's an attraction there.

Both ways. But it doesn't mean that it's. Correct. Before the Lord. That's the second thing. And the last thing. Which is good. To be content. In your situation.

[51 : 29] Just ask the Lord to help you. That's all my notes. Thanks so much Jen. That's great. Turn to the person.

That you've been talking to. And just pray. Pray for one another. Pray for our church. Let's commit these things to the Lord. And then I'll close in prayer. In about three minutes. Father we thank you so much.

For what we've been able to learn. Over these last three weeks. We thank you. For the clarity. And the honesty. Of your word. We thank you for what. Jen was able to share with us. As well. And we. We thank you.

For your work in her life. And for just the way. That we see. You in her. As she pursues. The Lord Jesus. And longs to live for him. Pray that we'd all be doing that.

Whatever our. Status that we find ourselves in. Married or unmarried. That we would be. Pursuing Christ. And living for him. And his glory. We want to ask. As well. Especially that you'd help us.

[52 : 26] To be a church. Which helps one another. That encourages one another. That doesn't make unhelpful. Assumptions. Or statements to one another. But encourages each other. To pursue Jesus.

And to find all our hope and joy in him. Amen. Amen. Amen.