

Team Relationships



Topic

Relationships

Theme

Whether single or married, the believer should honor and serve the Lord.

Desired Learner Response

The learner, whether single or married, will focus on serving God through his or her life.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 10

Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 7

Summary

The Corinthian Christians faced several issues involving their marital status. Paul addressed these complicated and controversial issues and urged the Corinthians to honor and serve the Lord, whether married or unmarried.

Outline

I. Principles about Getting Married (7:1–9)

- A. Marriage is normal (7:1, 2)
- B. Marriage is a partnership (7:3–5)
- C. Marriage is optional (7:6–9)

II. Principles about Staying Married (7:10–24)

- A. Instructions for a believing couple (7:10, 11)
- B. Instructions for a believer married to an unbeliever (7:12–24)

III. Principles about Singleness (7:25–38)

- A. Free to stay single or to marry (7:25–28)
- B. Free to serve the Lord (7:29–38)

IV. Principles about Remarriage (7:39, 40)

- A. Free to remarry after spouse dies (7:39)
- B. Free to remarry in the Lord (7:39)
- C. Free to remain unmarried (7:40)

Memory Verse

*“For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant”
(1 Corinthians 7:22).*

GETTING STARTED

Thick as Thieves

ASK: What does the phrase *thick as thieves* mean? *It means two people are so close that they are comfortable sharing secrets with each other.*

Sometimes basketball teammates are *thick as thieves*. They support each other and compete hard to see the other player succeed. They don't compete for the spotlight.

ASK: Should married couples be *thick as thieves*? Explain. *Yes. They should have a close relationship and a desire to see each other succeed.*

Strong couples are an asset for team church. They model Biblical love and share that love with the rest of the church and those they are trying to reach for Christ. Single people can be strong assets too as they give themselves to the Lord's work. Paul talked about the importance of relationships within team church and encouraged all believers, no matter their marital status, to be faithful to the Lord.

Word Association

Write the word *marriage* on the board and ask the learners what other words come to mind when they see this word. After compiling a list, invite the learners to review the words and to decide whether each word communicates something positive or negative about marriage. Put a plus sign beside each positive word and a minus sign beside each negative word.

ASK: What might make a marriage a positive relationship? *The love of Christ and attitudes and actions that are in harmony with Scripture.*

ASK: What might make a marriage a negative relationship? *Any action or motive that is in violation of Scripture and its template for marriage.*

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Although marriage receives more than its share of bad publicity, it ought to be the closest and best relationship a man and a woman share in this life. In 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul sanctioned marriage, addressed some marital problems, and provided marriage counseling. In the same chapter, he honored singleness as an option in the will of God. So both married and single people can benefit from a careful study of this passage of Scripture.

I. Principles about Getting Married (7:1–9)**A. Marriage is normal (7:1, 2)**

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:1.

Chapters 7 through 14 contain some of the most difficult passages to interpret in all of Paul's writings. He appears here to be responding to questions sent to him by the Corinthians—as implied by his words, *Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me* (7:1). This format continues throughout the rest of the book (7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12).

The Biblical concept of marriage, once recognized universally in our culture as being wholesome and vital to the society's future, is under extreme pressure and attack today. Various levels of government now recognize and sanction gay marriage. The Bible clearly forbids such a practice. Sanctifying gay marriages weakens the Biblical institute of marriage. This follows many decades of an increasing number of people practicing divorce outside the guidelines of Scripture.

Some in Corinth believed a Greek philosophy that the body was inherently bad. This attitude spawned asceticism, and asceticism spawned celibacy (cf. Col. 2:20–23). Paul appears to be agreeing with this thinking in the first verse of 1 Corinthians 7, but in 1 Timothy 4:1–3 he attributed such thinking to demonic influence. His opening words in 1 Corinthians 7 support the conclusion that marriage is normal and certainly is an option for the believer. Jesus did not impose celibacy either. In fact, He chose to perform His first miracle at a Jewish wedding ceremony, thereby blessing the institution of marriage (cf. John 2:1–11).

Later in his discussion on marriage, Paul did point out that celibacy can have advantages (7:29–34), but he never demanded anyone stay single. He regarded marriage as normal. And knowing how immoral Corinth was and understanding that sexual temptation abounded there, he presented marriage as the only honorable intimate relationship between a man and a woman (7:2).

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:2. **ASK:** What are some practical implications of having one's own spouse? (Q3) *A husband and wife should be devoted to each other. They should not entertain lustful thoughts for others or view materials that excite lusts for others. They should seek to meet each other's need for intimacy. They should show genuine love and concern for each other.*

God planned marriage as a close and abiding relationship (Gen. 2:18–25). Paul speaks very candidly about it here, but he is careful to be tactful in his choice of words. There is nothing sensational or provocative in his writing.

B. Marriage is a partnership (7:3–5)

Marriage is not a 50/50 proposition, as some suggest; it is actually a 100/100 partnership. In Paul's description of marriage, a husband gives himself 100 percent to his wife, and she gives herself 100 percent to him. The sexual relationship offers both husband and wife the opportunity to give themselves to each other in a selfless and loving manner.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:3. **ASK:** Why is the verb *render* important in this verse? (Q4) *The word render puts the emphasis on a spouse's responsibility to care for the other spouse's needs. Selflessness rather than selfishness is the pattern Paul prescribed.*

ASK: Why is selfishness so destructive in a marriage relationship? (Q5) *Selfishness destroys a marriage. The man and wife become competitors with one another instead of partners.*

Each partner ought to respect and meet the needs of the other, withholding physical intimacy only by mutual agreement for the purpose of pursuing spiritual concerns (7:3–5a). To avoid any temptation to become unfaithful, abstinence must not continue indefinitely (7:5b).

C. Marriage is optional (7:6–9)

Paul wanted the Corinthian church to understand that his counsel did not command anyone to get married (7:6). In fact, he preferred and recommended

singleness (7:7a). However, he recognized the ability to live as a single as a gift from God. If a person does not possess that gift, he or she should not insist upon remaining single for all of life. Every Christian has some gift (7:7b), which he or she ought to accept and develop.

ASK: What could happen to a single person's effectiveness for God if he views himself as *broken* or incomplete because of his singleness? (Q6) *The single person could render himself useless if he fixates on not having a spouse. Single people can be so set on finding a spouse that they miss God's will and desire for their lives.*

ASK: What is wrong with the notion that getting married will make a person's life complete? (Q7) *Only Christ can make a person's life complete. A single person should pursue a vital relationship with Christ, trusting God to provide a spouse if it is God's will.*

To the widowed and unmarried, Paul recommended the single life but sanctioned marriage for those whose desires made their singleness unworkable (7:8, 9).

II. Principles about Staying Married (7:10–24)

A. Instructions for a believing couple (7:10, 11)

Drawing from a command the Lord gave in Matthew 19:5 and 6, Paul instructed believing couples, *Let not the wife depart from her husband* (7:10). He added, *Let not the husband put away his wife* (7:11). If two Christians did divorce, they were to *remain unmarried, or be reconciled*.

Many believe that the Lord allowed an exception for divorce based on adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Jesus was speaking in the context of Jewish marriage customs, however, making interpretation of those verses more challenging. Thus, some believe that even adultery does not give Biblical grounds for divorce today.

Paul clearly instructed that divorce for any other reason is unacceptable between Christians. In cases where divorce has occurred, reconciliation should be sought if possible.

Some of the verses in 1 Corinthians 7 and other contexts that deal with marriage are difficult to interpret. Godly Bible scholars therefore differ in their interpretations. It would be wise to seek guidance from an experienced pastor or trusted Biblical counselor before attempting to apply this passage to a specific marriage counseling situation.

ASK: Why should believers find it easier than unbelievers to keep their marriages together? (Q8) *They are bound by a commitment before God. And they have the Holy Spirit living within them to love one another, to meet each other's needs, and to live in harmony.*

B. Instructions for a believer married to an unbeliever (7:12–24)

Next, Paul addressed those who were married before getting saved but whose spouses were still unsaved. Having no command from the Lord to quote, Paul had to give his own counsel, which in this case was divinely inspired. He ruled that a

Although many scholars agree that adultery offers grounds for divorce, others believe the *bill of divorcement* (Deut. 24:1) that Moses discussed only severed a pre-marriage contract rather than a marriage. For example, while engaged to Mary, Joseph learned she was pregnant and determined to *put her away* (Matt. 1:19).

The Bible does not deal with every potential situation that may arise, but instead unequivocally promotes the concept of life-long marriage (cf. Mal. 2:16).

saved husband should not divorce his unsaved wife if she wanted to continue the marriage (7:12).

Similarly, a saved wife should not leave her unsaved husband (7:13). A believer's presence in the home places the unsaved family members in the favorable position of receiving blessings (7:14). As God pours blessing into the believer's life, some of the blessing spills onto his family members. If an unsaved spouse insists on filing for divorce, however, the saved spouse need not contest the action (7:15).

Naturally, a saved spouse would try to keep the unsaved partner in the marriage, hoping to be able to lead the partner to the Lord; but there was no way of knowing if this would happen (7:16). Indeed, if a saved spouse tried to force the unsaved partner to stay in the marriage, this might lessen the likelihood that the partner would trust in Christ.

READ: 1 Corinthians 7:16. **ASK:** What should those who are considering marriage as a good witnessing opportunity learn from Paul's instructions? (Q9)

The idea of marrying an unbeliever in hopes of seeing the person believe in Christ is completely without merit (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14).

ASK: What could a believing spouse do to reach his unbelieving spouse?

(Q10) *He or she should pray for the other spouse and attempt to be a model testimony before that person (cf. 1 Pet. 3:1, 2).*

In 7:17–24 Paul instructed the Corinthian believers, *as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. . . . Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.* Those who were married when they became Christians did not have to dissolve their marriages; nor did single Corinthians have to get married because they had become Christians. Because they were saved, the Corinthians did not have to switch jobs or change their marital status. Furthermore, they did not have to become uncircumcised or circumcised. They were to focus their concern on obeying God.

III. Principles about Singleness (7:25–38)

A. Free to stay single or to marry (7:25–28)

Offering his advice for singles as one who was trustworthy (7:25), Paul first addressed single men. Because persecution was increasing, Paul felt it was best not to marry (7:26, 27b); but despite the difficult times, married persons should stay married (7:27a). Singles would not be committing a sin if they married, but they could expect additional stress (7:28).

ASK: Why might a person desire to stay single during times of persecution?

(Q11) *To avoid the heartache of losing a spouse or child. To remain free to serve God wholeheartedly without extra concern for one's responsibilities to a family.*

ASK: What might be some heartaches a married couple might experience

today? (Q12) *Illness, death of a spouse, a wayward child, death of a child, failures as a spouse.*

B. Free to serve the Lord (7:29–38)

Paul understood that the world order was passing away and that what Christians accomplished for Christ far outranked earthly values. He knew unmarried Christians could devote more time to Christian service than their married brethren could devote to it. The responsibilities of married life might distract Christians from spiritual pursuits. So it seemed best to recommend singleness (7:29–35). Once again, though, Paul assured the Corinthians that marriage was a viable option. A father was free either to give his daughter in marriage or to refrain from doing so (7:36, 37). Paul's personal preference was the latter option (7:38), likely because of the distressful times in which he and the Corinthians lived (cf. 7:26). The choice was not a matter of right or wrong but of good and better under first-century conditions in Corinth.

ASK: What pressures might singles face today? (Q13) *They might endure loneliness and physical temptations. They might have to learn to be dependent on others to help them with tasks outside their skill sets. They might feel out of place as a single person in a group of couples. They might be limited in what ministries they can take part in.*

ASK: Do you believe a single Christian has more time than a married Christian to devote to the Lord's service? Why or why not? (Q14)

RESOURCE: Display resource 10. **ASK:** What might cause us to be discontent with our lots in life? (Q15) (Reveal or record answers.) *Pride, jealousy, envy, and covetousness are sure to provoke discontentment.*

ASK: What might help us find contentment with our lots in life? (Q16) (Reveal or record answers.) *Keep eternity in view, focus on serving others, count your blessings, rejoice in the Lord, find your satisfaction in Christ.*

Each believer should focus not on his lot in life but on how he is to serve God in it.

IV. Principles about Remarriage (7:39, 40)

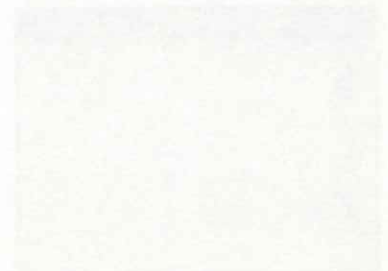
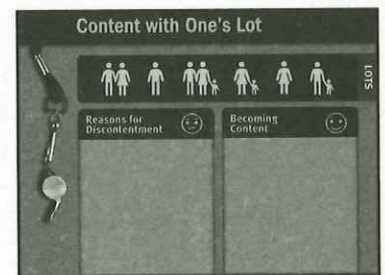
A. Free to remarry after spouse dies (7:39)

If people would take more time before marriage to consider what they are getting into, they may not be in such a hurry to get out of the marriage later. Getting married is sometimes referred to as *tying the knot*—a permanent knot instead of a slipknot. Marriage is supposed to bind a man and a woman together in a permanent, loving relationship. Ideally, marriage is supposed to last until death and not simply until divorce.

The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth, Paul wrote (7:39a), echoing the clear truth of Scripture throughout both the Old and New Testaments. But he made it clear that a widow, and by inference a widower, is free to remarry. He counseled, *but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will* (7:39).

B. Free to remarry in the Lord (7:39)

Widows and widowers face one restriction in remarrying. They may marry



only in the Lord (7:39). Only as a believer marries another believer can he or she find maximum fulfillment in marriage. As two persons love each other and love the Lord, they enjoy a harmonious relationship that carries them through the tests and strains of life. Their mutual faith enables them to pray together and to claim the promises of God's Word. They discover what it means to be *heirs together of the grace of life* (1 Pet. 3:7). When Christians honor Christ in their marriage, they enjoy the sweetest human relationship this side of Heaven.

C. Free to remain unmarried (7:40)

As grand as marriage is, for those who have received the gift of singleness, singleness is better. Believing he was Spirit-directed in his writing, Paul counseled, *but she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God* (7:40).

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Single Focus

ASK: If you are single, what has been the focus of your life? How much does a desire for a spouse distract you from serving the Lord? (Q17)

ASK: What opportunities to serve God will you take advantage of? (Q18)

Encourage singles to seek to serve God with their lives above all else.

God-Honoring Marriage

ASK: For those of you who are married, who do you think of first in your marriage, yourself or your wife? (Q19)

ASK: What recent instances illustrate your primary focus in your marriage? (Q20)

Encourage learners to evaluate their marriages from a Biblical perspective and make use of Scripturally-based resources to continually grow the quality of their marriages and homes, which will please the Lord and enhance the effectiveness of their testimonies.

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Honor and serve God no matter your lot in life.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 7:22. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.

