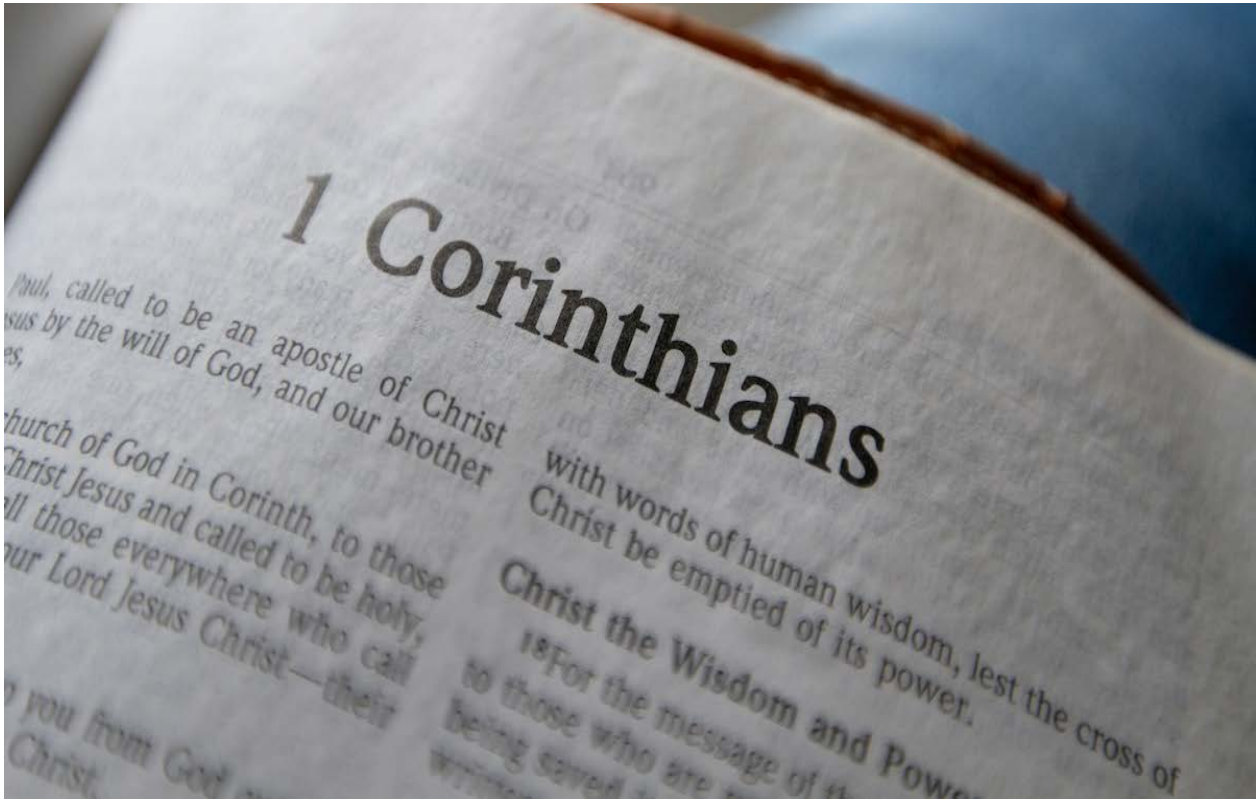


# Calling

1 Corinthians 7  
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 8



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*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

Calling: 1 Corinthians 7  
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 8  
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## Introduction to *1 Corinthians 7*

Every believer has a calling from God.

We are God's agents of grace, and He has sent us to the world—to our part of the world—to love Him and our neighbors and to make known the Good News of His Kingdom.

Everyone's calling is different, and everyone's calling matters.

Let's make sure we understand ours and that we're doing in our calling what God intends.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 The Gift of Marriage

*Pray Psalm 45.13-17.*

The royal daughter is all glorious within *the palace*;  
Her clothing *is* woven with gold.  
She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors;  
The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You.  
With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought;  
They shall enter the King's palace.  
Instead of Your fathers shall be Your sons,  
Whom You shall make princes in all the earth.  
I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations;  
Therefore the people shall praise You forever and ever.

*Sing Psalm 45.13-17.*

(Manoah: *When All Your Mercies, O My God*)

The Church in robes of woven gold assembles to the King.  
With joy complete and gladness bold His praise she e'er shall sing.

When we at last Your palace gain, and others take our place,  
then let our children with You reign, a legacy of grace!

*Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 7.1-9.*

*Preparation*

1. How did Paul counsel married couples?
2. What “gifts” from God did Paul mention in these verses?

*Meditation*

We need to read back to front to understand this passage as Paul intends. Marriage, Paul insisted, is a gift from God (v. 7). God gives men and women to each other as part of His perfect plan for their lives. At the same time, celibacy—refraining from marriage—is also a gift of God, given to those He has called according to His secret counsel. Both estates are good and useful for the Lord's glory.

Paul stated a clear preference for celibacy (vv. 7, 8). He did not command this nor even encourage it as better than marriage. He simply stated a preference from within the context of his own gift and calling from the Lord.

Married and celibate alike must “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6.18; 7.1, 9). Marriage is the proper setting for sexual enjoyment and fulfillment, and husbands and wives must consider each other's needs in this area, but always as unto the Lord, not merely for fleshly indulgence (vv. 2-5). Satan can use sexual relations to overpower the unwary and wreak havoc within the community of faith (v. 5; cf. 1 Cor. 5). We must always guard against this.

Paul elsewhere used marriage to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His Church. He concluded Ephesians 5.22-33 with sound marital advice: “Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and the let wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.” Our marriages can be a witness to Jesus and a precious gift from God if we love one another with His unbreakable love.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

This Scripture is one of the most misquoted, then poorly understood passages of all time, in the hands of

judgmental Christian readers, and non-believers alike.

Men have wrongly used it to put themselves in authority over everybody—not just their wives—but of all creatures great and small; conveniently missing the part about wives having authority over husbands, as well. And women’s libbers have had a large scream over the unfairness of it all, again, missing the words including both husbands and wives.

A common sense reading of this passage gives everyone their due, and everyone gets equal warning about sexual misconduct in all its ugly forms.

Paul is not the boogey-man some folks like to make him out to be. He is a good thinker and covers all the bases in his teachings, which need to be taken as a whole and not picked apart willy-nilly.

This is the same writer who said, “Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13.8); who loved Jesus pre-eminently and longed for his readers to have a broader grasp of what a fully focused life in Christ should entail. He wrote: “And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to our mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Therefore brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8.10-14).

As Jesus so beautifully said, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing” (Lk. 12.22, 23).

And it is certainly about more than sex. We must get over it. Look beyond it.

Truly, it is a joy when experienced righteously. But experienced unrighteously? It is a snare and trap that Satan uses over and over *ad nauseum, ad infinitum*.

Catch on to his wiles and flee (1 Cor. 6.18)!

For “Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (Mal. 3.18).

*For reflection*

1. What does Paul mean by saying that both men and women have “authority” in a marriage?
2. How can they be sure they are exercising that authority properly?
3. What is the most important thing for making a marriage work as God intends?

*The Corinthians were asking Paul whether it was right for lawfully married Christians, once they were baptized, to enjoy sexual relations with each other. Paul answered by praising chastity, condemning fornication and allowing conjugal relations.*

Theodoret of Cyr (393-466), *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* 200

*Pray Psalm 45.1-7.*

In prayer, meditate on the beauty of Jesus, exalted in glory and coming soon to take us, His Bride, unto Himself. Meditate on the marriage feast He is preparing for us—an eternal feeding on His beauty, goodness, grace, and power. Give thanks and praise to our Husband and King.

*Calling: 1 Corinthians 7*

*Sing Psalm 45.1-7.*

(Manoah: *When All Your Mercies, O My God*)

O my heart, let now a pleasing theme overflow to praise the LORD.  
My song I pledge to You, my King, and dedicate my words.

You of all men are the fairest, LORD, and Your lips are flush with grace;  
thus God has blessed You evermore before His holy face.

Your sword gird on Your thigh, O LORD, in splendid majesty;  
ride out, resplendent in Your Word, to glorious victory.

For meekness and for righteousness Your Right Hand shall prevail.  
Your foes shall come to deep distress when You their souls assail.

Your throne, O God, is evermore, and upright is Your reign;  
though wicked men Your Name abhor, Your righteousness must gain.

## 2 Staying the Course in Marriage

*Pray Psalm 56.10-13.*

In God (I will praise *His* word),  
In the LORD (I will praise *His* word),  
In God I have put my trust;  
I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?  
Vows *made* to You *are binding* upon me, O God;  
I will render praises to You,  
For You have delivered my soul from death.  
*Have You* not *kept* my feet from falling,  
That I may walk before God  
In the light of the living?

*Sing Psalm 56.10-13.*

(Morecambe: *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart*)  
I will not fear what foes might do to me.  
I give You thanks, my vows will I renew.  
You have redeemed me, set my spirit free,  
and ever in Your light I'll walk with You.

*Read 1 Corinthians 7.1-16; meditate on verses 10-16.*

*Preparation*

1. What did Paul say about divorce?
2. Why should believing spouses remain with unbelieving ones, if they can?

*Meditation*

Let's take the view from 30,000 feet so that we don't get confused about Paul's teaching on marriage. Marriage, Paul is saying, is very important. Married couples should stay together, especially if they are believers (vv. 10, 11). This was God's plan from the beginning.

And if you are a believer married to an unbeliever, do your best to keep your marriage together, and that for two reasons. First, your children will benefit from it, especially those who have been set apart unto the Lord from childhood. But second, your being faithful to the Lord will show a kind of character that allows the grace of God to flow to your unbelieving spouse, which may—*may*, he emphasizes—end up in that unbelieving spouse coming to faith (vv. 12-14).

But if you are a believer married to an unbeliever, and that unbeliever wants out of the marriage, either by suing for divorce or through abandonment, don't contest it. Let them go. Keep the peace as best you can, for God has called us to be a peaceable people (v. 15). In such situations, the believing spouse is no longer obligated to marriage vows effectively destroyed by the other spouse. Which means, that innocent spouse is free to marry again.

OK, that's clear enough. Paul explained, in verses 12-16, that he had no direct revelation from the Lord on this matter; he was giving his opinion, based on his knowledge of Scripture and his understanding of our calling to the Kingdom and glory of the Lord. That doesn't mean these verses are not inspired, or not part of Scripture. Paul was clear enough on these topics to assert his view confidently, and that is tantamount to a word from the Lord.

Marriage is a gift from God, and we must use that gift as He intends, that He may be glorified through our marriage.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

“But God has called us to peace” (1 Cor. 7.15).

So say the Scriptures, so said Paul.

As an aside, abuse in a marriage is a form of abandonment. If there is abuse of any kind going on in a marriage, the abused party is free to leave, perhaps with the hope that putting “away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Cor. 5.13) will bring about repentance and salvation in the end (1 Cor. 7.16).

Now to the peace which we are to seek:

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph. 5.15-17).

“Great peace have those who love Your law,  
and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps. 119.165).

“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You,  
because He trusts in You” (Is. 26.3).

Pat Hunter, our mentor, had some great words of wisdom for a happy marriage. She said we are to love, not because of the target; but because of the love God generates in our hearts. Well said, no?

Love like that helps us to stay the course in marriage, for the good days and the bad. Those days we’ve vowed to love through: “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God’s holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge myself to you.”

That’s the peace in marriage which God the Creator (Gen. 2.24) has called us to.  
We can “Stay the Course” through Him, His power, His faithfulness, and His love!

*For reflection*

1. Why is marriage so important to the divine plan for humankind?
2. What would you say are the keys for staying the course in marriage?
3. How can believers help one another to stay the course in marriage?

*Marriage is a Divine institution; and is an engagement for life, by God’s appointment. We are bound, as much as in us lies, to live peaceably with all men, Romans 12:18, therefore to promote the peace and comfort of our nearest relatives, though unbelievers. It should be the labor and study of those who are married, to make each other as easy and happy as possible.*  
Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on the 1 Corinthians 7.10-16*

*Pray Psalm 56.1-9.*

Bring your challenges, trials, fears, and concerns to the Lord. Lay them at His feet and ask Him for mercy and grace to help in your time of need.

*Sing Psalm 56.1-9.*

(Morecambe: *Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart*)

Savior, be gracious, gracious unto me!

Weary, I seek the shelter of Your wings.

‘Til trouble passes, ‘til my sighings flee;



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I seek the LORD Who for me does all things.

When I'm afraid I'll put my trust in You,  
You, LORD, Whose everlasting Word I praise.  
I will not fear what foes to me might do,  
but will in faith to You my crying raise.

Wickedly how my foes distort my words.  
Constant attacks and snares await my way.  
Pour out Your wrath, consume them, mighty LORD!  
Bring evil to its end, O LORD, I pray!

LORD, see my wand'rings, see my anxious tears!  
Help me to trust and praise Your holy Word.  
Gladly I know that when I call You hear;  
I will not fear but trust in You, O LORD.

### 3 Called

*Pray Psalm 25.4, 5.*

Show me Your ways, O LORD;  
Teach me Your paths.  
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,  
For You are the God of my salvation;  
On You I wait all the day.

*Sing Psalm 25.4, 5.*

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Make me to know Your ways, teach me Your paths, O LORD!  
My Savior, all day long I wait and seek You in Your Word.

*Read 1 Corinthians 7.1-24; meditate on verses 17-24.*

*Preparation*

1. What does Paul mean by “calling”?
2. What are we supposed to do in our calling?

*Meditation*

Paul turns to address the matter of calling, that is, one’s station in life, that part of the world in which we live out our salvation. Each of us has a calling from the Lord (v. 17). In his commentary on this verse, Calvin notes that “everyone should be contented with his calling, and pursue it, instead of seeking to betake himself to anything else. A calling in Scripture means a lawful mode of life, for it has a relation to God as calling us...”

God calls us to repentance and faith while we are in a place or condition of life—our marital status, work, group of friends, all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. He saves us and makes us His servants, right where we are. There is no need to seek another calling, for the one in which God called us to Himself is replete with opportunities to serve Him. In our calling we shake off all the old leaven, anything that yet binds us to worldly or fleshly ways, and we put on Jesus, to follow and serve Him in all we do.

The handbook for carrying out our calling is “the commandments of God” (v. 19). We can keep God’s Law wherever we are, whatever we’re doing, and this is the proof both that God has called us and that we are His. We must not seek to quit our calling but to enrich it with the new leaven of Jesus (vv. 20-22). God can move us to a new calling if He wills. But we must not say, “If only I had a *different* calling, a *holier* calling, then I could really serve the Lord.” Nonsense. We are saved, indwelt by the Spirit, invested with the Law of God (Ezek. 36.26, 27), appointed to be witnesses, translated into God’s Kingdom, and set as agents of His grace whatever our calling.

Jesus purchased us with His blood right where we are (v. 23). And right where we are—until He makes it clear otherwise—is where He intends us to put our bodies in motion serving and glorifying Him.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

In God’s economy and wisdom, He has made sure that all the Kingdom bases are covered. He has saved people in all walks of life and work. There is someone proclaiming the goodness, mercy, grace, forgiveness, and love of God in every sphere of life.

Of course, He can move around the pieces on His gameboard as He sees fit, to fill in gaps or enlarge a work,

but for the most part, He tells us to “walk” where we have been “distributed” and “called” (1 Cor. 7.17). Always being aware that “keeping the commandments of God” is what matters most (1 Cor. 7.19). (*Ergo*, if we were busy doing nefarious and illegal things when saved, we can safely assume that a career change would be appropriate.)

Two things about the story of Naaman are pertinent to this conversation:

1. The young girl from the land of Israel, taken captive by the Syrians, and serving in the house of Naaman, was the voice of reason and salvation for him. She recommended that the prophet in Samaria could heal Naaman of his leprosy. She was a believer in Israel who was moved to a foreign country to share the good news of God with those people. We never hear that she was returned to Israel, only that she served God faithfully in Syria.
2. After Naaman was healed through Elisha, by God’s power, Naaman became a believer. His testimony? “Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel...” But Naaman also knew that he needed to go back to Syria to serve his unbelieving master. His request to Elisha? “Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing.” And what did Elisha say to this request? “Go in peace” (2 Kgs. 5.1-19).

The servant girl’s testimony changed Naaman’s life and probably many others. And who knows how many lives were changed because of Naaman’s healing and testimony? We can only imagine, but my guess? One day we will meet many people in heaven who are there due to the work of these two believers: faithful in their spheres, in their time, in their Personal Mission Fields.

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2.10).

“Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful...” (Ps. 31.23).

Faithfully walk where you have been called.

“You were bought at a price” for this purpose (1 Cor. 7.23).

*For reflection*

1. How would you explain the idea of calling to a new believer?
2. How would you explain your own calling to that same new believer?
3. What can you do to improve your understanding of your calling and the work you do in fulfilling it?

*Faith and the Christian life are so free in essence that they are bound to no particular order or estate of society, but they are to be found in and throughout all orders and estates. Therefore you need not accept or give up any particular estate in order to be saved. On the contrary, the estate in which faith and the gospel find you, there you may stay and find your salvation. Martin Luther (1483-1546), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7:17*

*Pray Psalm 25.16-22.*

Ask the Lord for mercy and grace for all your times of need. Call on Him to cleanse you of all sin and to fill you with His Spirit for this day’s work. Let His Word be at work in you to transform you increasingly into the image of Jesus.

*Sing Psalm 25.16-22.*

(Festal Song: *Rise Up, O Men of God*)

Be gracious, LORD, to me; my heart is weighed with woe.  
My troubles and affliction see; let my transgressions go.

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Consider all my foes, who hate me all the day;  
and rescue my poor soul lest I should stumble in the way.

Preserve me in Your way, redeem Your people, LORD!  
We wait for You and refuge seek in Your own faithful Word.

## 4 Content in Our Calling

*Pray Psalm 72.7-11.*

In His days the righteous shall flourish,  
And abundance of peace,  
Until the moon is no more.  
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth.  
Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before Him,  
And His enemies will lick the dust.  
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles  
Will bring presents;  
The kings of Sheba and Seba  
Will offer gifts.  
Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him;  
All nations shall serve Him.

*Sing Psalm 72.7-11.*

(Martyrdom: *Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*)

Let righteousness abundant be where Jesus' reign endures;  
let peace increase from sea to sea 'til moonlight shall be no more.

And let the Righteous rule the earth, and let His foes bow low;  
let nations praise His matchless worth, and all His bidding do.

*Read 1 Corinthians 7.1-31; meditate on verses 25-31.*

*Preparation*

1. Of what is Paul trying to spare the Corinthians?
2. Why should we not be concerned about worldly needs?

*Meditation*

Paul counseled contentment here, hoping to show the Corinthians how to keep from being bogged down and overwhelmed by concerns that are more worldly than spiritual.

This comes back to his previous teaching about calling. Those who are unmarried should not be frantic to marry, but learn contentment. Those who are married must not seek to be “loosed” from their vows, but serve the Lord from within their calling. Marriage is good if God calls you to it (v. 28). Paul’s guiding concern is that his readers not become entangled in fleshly snares because they have not made God’s calling their defining priority.

At the same time, he does not want people to lose sight of the fact that “the time *is* short”, so that they postpone their work of serving the Lord and seeking His Kingdom. In all our work—all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities—we must make the most of our time for the Kingdom and glory of God. The enigmatic way Paul phrases this in verses 29-31 is just another way of encouraging readers to keep focused on Christ and His calling rather than become caught up in, distracted by, and worn out with chasing worldly forms and priorities. Keep your Kingdom calling as primary, and everything else will fall into place, just as Jesus promised (Matt. 6.33).

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

There is an urgency to the Christian life that, if ignored, is to our own peril.

Jesus said, “Behold, I AM coming quickly...My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work...Surely I AM coming quickly” (Rev. 22.7, 12, 20).

Paul said, “...the time is short...the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7.29, 31).

Peter said, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...therefore since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness...?” (2 Pet. 3.8-11)

The psalmist wrote, “I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments” (Ps. 119.60).

Moses said, “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90.12).

John said, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1.3).

We have been given work to do in our Personal Mission Field. We must be faithful to do that work daily, for truly, we do not know how many days we have, or how many are left for the world as we know it. That is God’s business and His prerogative. But even so, urgency seems to have been at the heart of the work of Jesus, Peter, Paul and all the saints of the past.

Perhaps we should take a hint from them and get urgent about our Kingdom calling?

*For reflection*

1. What does it mean for you to be content in your calling?
2. What does it mean for you to be urgent about fulfilling your calling?
3. If we are content and urgent in the calling God has appointed for us, what can we expect from Him?

*That condition of life is best for every man, which is best for his soul, and keeps him most clear of the cares and snares of the world. Let us reflect on the advantages and snares of our own condition in life; that we may improve the one, and escape as far as possible all injury from the other. And whatever cares press upon the mind, let time still be kept for the things of the Lord.*

Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7.25-35*

*Pray Psalm 72.15-19.*

Thank God for your calling in life, all aspects of it, and call on Him to provide for all your needs as you seek His Kingdom and righteousness this day.

*Sing Psalm 72.15-19.*

(Martyrdom: *Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed*)

Let Christ be praised and all the gold of Sheba be His right;  
let blessings to His Name be told, and prayers made both day and night.

And let the earth abound with grain, let fields His fame proclaim;  
and may our King forever reign and nations bless His great Name.

Now bless the God of Israel Who wondrous works performs.  
And bless His Name, His glory tell both now and forevermore!

## 5 Undistracted

*Pray Psalm 38.9-12.*

Lord, all my desire *is* before You;  
And my sighing is not hidden from You.  
My heart pants, my strength fails me;  
As for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me.  
My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague,  
And my relatives stand afar off.  
Those also who seek my life lay snares *for me*;  
Those who seek my hurt speak of destruction,  
And plan deception all the day long.

*Sing Psalm 38.9-12.*

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

You know all my desire, my sighs You know full well.  
My strength fails and light's holy fire my eyes dispel.  
My friends and loved ones fail; the wicked do me wrong.  
My life they seek, my soul assail the whole day long.

*Read 1 Corinthians 7.1-35; meditate on verses 32-35.*

*Preparation*

1. What did Paul want for all these people?
2. What danger did they face?

*Meditation*

Again, we can understand Paul's teaching here if we start at the end: What did Paul want for these folks?

He was not proposing absolute conditions or trying to control their behavior or “put a leash” on them. He was guiding them into the kind of conduct that is profitable and proper for every believer, that they (and we) should “serve the Lord without distraction” (v. 35). That, after all, is the essence of what it means to fulfill our calling from the Lord, no matter the state or condition of our lives.

Marriage has its share of situations and responsibilities that could distract us from our calling (vv. 33, 34). But that need not be so. Paul offers a caution here: Be aware that marriage can open the door to all kinds of worldly distractions—money, children, managing a home, providing for a family, resolving conflicts. But these need not be distractions if we can remember that marriage is what God has called us to, and all these aspects of marriage—and more—are only arenas for fulfilling our calling.

But, while the unmarried may not have the same distractions as married folk, and thus would seem to be in a better position to serve the Lord, let them not be deceived. The people Paul addressed in verse 35, to profit them in their proper walk with and work for the Lord, had distractions of their own. Paul is telling it “slant” here, holding out caveats to the married and unmarried alike that they must not allow anything to distract them from their calling to serve the Lord. Rather, they must make the most of all their time and opportunities for serving the Lord without distraction whatever their calling.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

There is great joy, peace, contentment, and fulfillment in knowing and embracing our [Personal Mission Field](#).

Living fully within those boundaries, we can always “serve the Lord without distraction” (1 Cor. 7.35),

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regardless of our station in life. Whether we are married, a parent, a brain surgeon, a garbage collector, a teacher, pastor, or clerk (and a zillion and one other possibilities), we belong to God and have been bought at a great price (1 Cor. 7.23) to do the good works that God has prepared for us to do before we were ever born (Eph. 2.10).

As we frequently note, the work we've been given to do is greater than the job at which we work. When we are convinced that this is true, and embrace our Kingdom work, whatever it happens to be, with obedience to God's Law and trust in His guidance and mercy, we will happily accomplish His goals and plans for us "without care" (1 Cor. 7.32).

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29.11 NIV).

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct—make smooth or straight—your paths" (Prov. 3.5, 6).

It takes all kinds of people, in all walks of life, to flesh out the Christian world. Happily, we are all necessary and individually significant in this Kingdom work. If you are not working your field, there will be a gaping hole that no one else can fill.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Eccl. 12.13), and "serve the Lord" (1 Cor. 7.35).

As Martin Luther wrote in 1529:  
"The Spirit and the gifts are ours  
through Him Who with us sideth.  
Let goods and kindred go,  
this mortal life also;  
the body they may kill:  
God's truth abideth still;  
His Kingdom is forever."

*For reflection*

1. How can you know when you are being distracted from your calling to the Kingdom and glory of God? What should you do then?
2. How can we as believers help each other to stay focused on our calling and faithful in our work?
3. Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field? If not, [click here](#) to watch a brief video and download the Personal Mission Field worksheet.

*As to all worldly concerns; they must keep the world out of their hearts, that they may not abuse it when they have it in their hands. All worldly things are show; nothing solid. All will be quickly gone. Wise concern about worldly interests is a duty; but to be full of care, to have anxious and perplexing care, is a sin. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7.32-35*

*Pray Psalm 38.17-22.*

Ask the Lord to search your soul, to discover any distractions that are keeping you from fulfilling your calling. These might include neglect of prayer, fear of men, poor use of time, or not walking circumspectly. Confess any distractions and commit to a closer walk with the Lord in all your ways.



*Sing Psalm 38.17-22.*

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

My sins I now confess; my anxious soul relieve!

Though foes are strong, LORD, heal and bless all who believe!

Forsake me not, O LORD! Repay my foes with wrath.

Stand by me with Your saving Word and guard my path!

## 6 Marriage and Calling

*Pray Psalm 32.1, 2.*

Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven,  
Whose sin is covered.

Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,  
And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.

*Sing Psalm 32.1, 2.*

(Hendon: *Take My Life and Let It Be*)

Blessed are they whose sins the LORD has forgiven by His Word!  
Pure their spirits are within; them He charges with no sin;  
them He charges with no sin!

*Read 1 Corinthians 7.1-40; meditate on verse 36-40.*

*Prepare*

1. What did Paul teach about giving one's daughter in marriage?
2. What did he say about widows remarrying?

*Meditation*

The background for this last section of 1 Corinthians 7 is the matter of calling. Paul wrote that we should be content in the calling God has given to us, to serve Him faithfully there in every way we can. God might change our calling, but we should not seek a different calling apart from His clear leading.

That teaching applies to young girls and widows. In Paul's day, apparently, a father had the last word over whether his virgin daughter should marry. In Paul's view, it would be better if she did not, for this would require a change of calling (v. 38). After all, God had given her that calling—to be unmarried—both to bless her and to use her in His Kingdom. But if she did choose to marry, and if her father granted permission, that was fine, too. Her wanting to marry and her father's agreeing to it would be a strong indication that God was in it (v. 36).

At the same time, that father who will not agree to let his daughter marry “does well” by preserving her in her current calling. But that did not mean the young woman must resign herself to remain permanently unmarried. God can change minds, and He often does so in His time. The father's refusal to grant permission might only be for a time. And if he does change his mind, then he “does not sin” (v. 36).

Widows may remarry but “only in the Lord” (v. 40). Paul thinks they might be happier if they don't—and he thought he had the Spirit's consent on this issue. Nevertheless, he left the door open for a widow to change her calling if the Lord led and she could do so unto Him and for His glory.

It might seem as if Paul was talking out of both sides of his mouth on these matters. He wasn't. The overarching concern is that people should follow God's leading and serve in the calling He has appointed to them. That can change, but a person should only consider a change of calling if they can do so as unto the Lord and to improve their service in His Kingdom. We are not our own, after all.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

It is all a matter of the heart. Paul is teaching that regardless of our marital state, our sole purpose in life is to follow the Law of God, love the LORD with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. So said Jesus, as well (Matt. 22.37-40).

If we are married, we are to love God first and foremost.  
If we are single, we are to love God first and foremost.  
If we are a parent, we are to love God first and foremost.  
If we are widowed, we are to love God first and foremost.

The consistent theme being:

Love God most of all, serve Him first, seek His Kingdom above all things,  
and don't let anything in life distract us from that.

And all this is to be done by loving others with the love Paul spelled out in 1 Corinthians 13.

Jesus drew a very clear delineation between what people claim as religious “love” and “care” and what is truly love and care. We are not allowed to ignore our human responsibilities in order to show “love” for God. That is faux love at its worst.

Jesus pointed out this sinful misconstruing to the scribes and Pharisees: “For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God”— ‘then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites!” (Matt. 15.4-7).

Jesus also said to them, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matt. 23.23).

In other words, serving God faithfully must never be used as an excuse for ignoring a parent, a spouse, a child, or responsibilities due to an employer. God will not be party to shirking in His Name.

We have the Holy Spirit living within us (Acts 1.8); and we have been given the promise of wisdom if we ask for it (Jms. 1.5). So, we have all the tools necessary to do God's work in His way, which is altogether possible because with God, “Nothing will be impossible” (Lk. 1.37). Not even this.

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:  
‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’  
Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’” (Is. 6.8).

*For reflection*

1. What are some things that could hinder you in fulfilling your calling from the Lord? How should you deal with these things?
2. We cannot love our neighbors as we love ourselves unless we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Why is this necessarily true?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to keep love for God at the forefront of their soul?

*In our choice of relations, and change of conditions, we should always be guided by the fear of God, and the laws of God, and act in dependence on the providence of God. Change of condition ought only to be made after careful consideration, and on probable grounds, that it will be to advantage in our spiritual concerns. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7.36-40*

*Calling: 1 Corinthians 7*

*Pray Psalm 32.3-11.*

Pray that God will give you grace to recognize and resist temptation and to be faithful in working your calling for His glory.

*Sing Psalm 32.3-11.*

(Hendon: *Take My Life and Let It Be*)

When in silence I remained, groaning in my sinful pain,  
You Your hand upon me lay; all my strength You drained away,  
all my strength You drained away.

I confessed my sin to You; You forgave me, ever true!  
Let confession's pleading sound reach You while You may be found,  
reach You while You may be found!

When flood waters threaten me, You my hiding place will be.  
O'er them I will rise above, buoyed by Your redeeming love,  
buoyed by Your redeeming love.

Teach me, LORD, how I should live; sound instruction ever give.  
Let me never stubborn be; let Your eye watch over me,  
let Your eye watch over me.

Though the wicked wail and weep, they rejoice whose souls You keep.  
Trusting, we exult with praise, joyfully singing all our days,  
joyfully singing all our days!

## 7 Called to Freedom

*Pray Psalm 84.1-4.*

How lovely is Your tabernacle,  
O LORD of hosts!  
My soul longs, yes, even faints  
For the courts of the LORD;  
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.  
Even the sparrow has found a home,  
And the swallow a nest for herself,  
Where she may lay her young—  
Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
My King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;  
They will still be praising You.  
*Selah*

*Sing Psalm 84.1-4.*

(Holy Manna: *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

LORD of hosts, how sweet Your dwelling; how my soul longs for Your courts!  
Let my soul with joy keep telling of Your grace forevermore.  
Like a bird upon the altar, let my life to You belong.  
Blessed are they who never falter as they praise Your grace with song!

*Review 1 Corinthians 7.1-40; meditate on verses 17-22.*

*Preparation*

1. How does Paul use the idea of “calling” in this chapter?
2. How would you summarize his teaching on calling?

*Meditation*

1 Corinthians 7 is rightly understood in the light of Paul’s teaching about “calling”. But that teaching doesn’t begin here. In 1 Thessalonians 2.12—his earliest letter—Paul explains that God has called all those who believe in Jesus to His Kingdom and glory. This is the framework in which we give attention to all that we are and do. We are to seek the Kingdom of God—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—as the defining priority of our lives (Matt. 6.33; Rom. 14.17, 18). And we are to do everything to glorify and honor God and point others to Jesus (1 Cor. 10.31; Acts 1.8).

Married or unmarried, businessperson or homemaker, student or servant, professional or “retired”—it matters not who you are. You have a calling from God, and only as you embrace that calling will you be free from the allure of sin, the distractions of the world, and the natural human tendency to a “good enough” approach to life—free, that is, in the power of God’s Spirit and according to His Word, to take up your journey of faith each day and live for Christ and His Kingdom. Whatever our station or condition in life, God calls us there to serve Jesus with all our time, talent, treasure, thoughts, words, deeds, and aspirations.

Paul is working toward chapter 13 in which he will detail the demands of love, which is the essence of all our service. But here he establishes the idea he broached at the end of chapter 6. If you are a believer in Jesus, you are not your own. Jesus has bought you with His blood, and He calls you to serve Him in all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities. For as we do, we learn what it means to be truly free and wholly alive in the power of grace and truth.

*Calling: 1 Corinthians 7*

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

And in all those relationships, roles, and responsibilities, “keeping the commandments of God is what matters” (1 Cor. 7.19).

“Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD!

Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!

They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.

You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.

Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!

Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments.

I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments.

I will keep Your statutes; oh, do not forsake me utterly! (Ps. 119.1-8).

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name,

He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn. 14.26).

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love...” (Jn. 15.10).

“He has shown you, O man, what is good;

and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly,

to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6.8)

“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.

For God will bring every work into judgment, including

every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12.13, 14).

“My heart is set on keeping Your decrees to the very end” (Ps. 119.112 NIV).

Called and freed to keep God’s Law.

*For reflection*

1. From what does the Law of God free us? Unto what?

2. How does the Law of God help us in fulfilling our calling from the Lord?

3. Whom will you encourage today to keep focused on the Lord and walking according to His Word?

*The rules of Christianity reach every condition; and in every state a man may live so as to be a credit to it. It is the duty of every Christian to be content with his lot, and to conduct himself in his rank and place as becomes a Christian. Our comfort and happiness depend on what we are to Christ, not what we are in the world. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 16.2*

*Pray Psalm 84.5-12.*

Thank God that He has called you to His Kingdom and glory, and within that framework, to your own unique calling and ministry. Seek His strength for today’s journey. Call on Him for grace to fulfill your calling, and thank Him in advance for all the good things He will grant you.

*Sing Psalm 84.5-12.*

(Holy Manna: *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*)

Blessed are they whose strength is founded in Your strength, O LORD above.

All whose hearts in You are grounded journey in Your strength and love.

Though they weep with tears of sadness, grace shall all their way sustain.

*Calling: 1 Corinthians 7*

In Your Presence, filled with gladness, they shall conquer all their pain.

LORD of hosts, my prayer receiving, hear me, help me by Your grace!

In Your courts I stand believing; turn to me Your glorious face!

LORD, our sun, our shield, our glory, no good thing will You deny  
to those who proclaim Your story, and who on Your grace rely.

*Calling: 1 Corinthians 7*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. How would you explain the idea of “calling” to a new believer?
2. How can you know what your calling from the Lord is?
3. What does God expect from us as we serve Him in our calling?
4. Taking up our calling each day is where we experience true freedom and abundant life in Jesus. Explain.
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

*For prayer:*



## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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