

Singleness, Marriage, & Calling

I Corinthians 7 | Week Five

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now

Last time we read about sex, holiness, and worship. Paul admonished his readers to “flee from sexual immorality,” adding that our body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit,” and that we “were bought with a price.” Because of this, “glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:18-20). Moreover, without an emphasis on holiness, we could fall into immorality and foster disunity within the church.

This Week

This week we will explore the topics of singleness, marriage, and calling. These are important topics to consider, especially in our day and age when views of Christian insights on such relationships are often disparaged. The topic of calling is also addressed and is especially relevant to anyone pursuing academic studies and, ultimately, a future professional career.

The Big Idea

Whether we are single or married, God’s calling is critical in our lives. This doesn’t necessarily mean that we make some radical changes in our life. In most cases it means staying right where we are, but having a God-centered focus to everything we do in our lives, including our academic pursuits, career path, and personal relationships.

Memory Verse | Cor. 7:17

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 7:1-16 - *Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”* **2** *But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.* **3** *The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.* **4** *For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority*

- 1 | The Problem with Knowledge
- 2 | Wisdom of Man & Power of God
- 3 | Servanthood & Stewardship
- 4 | Sex, Holiness, and Worship
- 5 | Singleness, Marriage, & Calling
- 6 | Knowledge, Idolatry, & Surrender
- 7 | The Anatomy of an Idol
- 8 | All in the Family
- 9 | It’s All About Love
- 10 | Spiritual Gifts & The Church
- 11 | The Resurrection & The End

Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don’t Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

over his own body, but the wife does. **5** Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **6** Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. **7** I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. **8** To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. **9** But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. **10** To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband **11** (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife. **12** To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. **13** If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. **14** For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. **15** But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. **16** For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

1. Some people assume the Bible takes a negative view of sex, but what do verses 2-5 indicate about sex within Christian marriage?

Paul basically says that sex within marriage is good. He also says that the wife belongs to the husband and that the husband belongs to the wife. In verse 5 Paul underscores the importance of sex within marriage, noting that regular sexual activity in marriage should only cease for a brief time, and if both husband and wife agree about it, for the purposes of devoted prayer time.

2. In Roman law, divorce was allowed whether the husband or the wife initiated it, without needing any reason for it at all. How does this compare with the Christian view of marriage?

Paul's comments support a strong view of marriage, noting that divorce is far more the exception than the norm. Husband and wife belong to one another and both belong to God.

Ask someone to read verses 17-24 - *Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. **18** Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. **19** For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. **20** Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. **21** Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) **22** For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. **23** You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. **24** So, brothers, win whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*

3. Verses 17-24 mark a clear shift to the topic of calling. Based on your reading of this passage, what do you think Paul is saying about Christian calling?

Think About It

Illustrate It

What are some contemporary views of marriage and divorce that are at odds with the Christian approach? Share about how these contemporary views are very different from the Christian view of marriage.

Tie It Together

Far from being opposed to sexual intimacy in marriage, Christianity encourages it. Genesis 2:24 reads: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Ephesians 5:31 reiterates this concept, citing the Genesis passage: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

We should seek to live the life God has called us to live, within the framework of a Christian worldview. In many instances, this will mean staying where we are, such as in our academic pursuits or in our vocation, and living out our Christian lives wisely in those circumstances.

4. Consider your academic life and your future professional career. How does your calling fit with your studies now? How will it fit with your future career?

Answers will vary. Calling should be an integral part of our Christian lives. Every aspect of our lives, including our studies and future career, should relate to our Christian calling. We should be careful about thinking that we can divide our lives into sacred and secular “parts.” All of our Christian life and worldview, including our calling, academic studies, and future career plans should integrate well.

Ask someone to read verses 25-40 - *Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy. 26 I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. 27 Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. 28 But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. 29 This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, 30 and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, 31 and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. 32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. 36 If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. 37 But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. 38 So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better. 39 A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. 40 Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.*

5. Paul contrasts being married with being single, but doesn’t want to do away with either. How do you think being married or single impacts or will impact your academic studies? Your future job?

Answers will vary. Being married will allow for companionship, joy, sexual intimacy, the opportunity to have children, etc., but can also pose more domestic challenges and divert attention from God. Being single can allow one to focus more on God, as well as devote more time to a career.

Calling: “Do you have a reason for being, a focused sense of purpose in your life? Or is your life the product of shifting resolutions and the myriad pulls of forces outside yourself? Do you want to go beyond success to significance? Have you come to realize that self-reliance always falls short and that world-denying solutions provide no answer in the end? Listen to Jesus of Nazareth; answer his call.”
Os Guinness, *The Call*

Tips for a Better Discussion

If you find it is too much for one person to read the lengthy passage in verses 25 to 40, you may wish to read part of it yourself or ask two people to read portions of the text.

Wrapping Up

6. Paul writes in verse 31, “the present form of this world is passing away.” What do you think he intends to communicate by saying this?

This earthly life and all the material possessions in it that we often attach so much value to is going to pass away, as are all the daily challenges we face in it. Eternity and human immortality matter far more, but this does not mean we neglect our calling or purpose in serving God in this life.

On a white board he drew a horizontal line with arrows pointing out at each end. “This is all of time, eternity past and eternity future at opposite ends.” Then, in the middle of the line, he drew a small dot and said, “This is your life, a speck in comparison to eternity.” God wants us to have an eternal perspective of life since our lives on earth are so short in the grand scheme of eternity. ***“Foolish people live for the dot. Wise people live for the line.”***

Matt 6:19-20

As your discussion comes to a close, end the session in prayer.